

In 1980, there were roughly three hundred stamp shops on Britain's high streets.

Today, I would be surprised if there were twenty.

Now, the temptation is to read that as a story about the slow decline of the hobby.

As if the disappearance of the physical shop is somehow the disappearance of the thing itself.

But I don't think that's accurate to say.

The market for stamps hasn't collapsed at all.

Prices, on the whole, have held up rather well. New collectors continue to appear. Old ones return. The interest is still very much there.

What's changed, I think, is something more practical.

The average age of our stamp collectors today is, by my reckoning, somewhere around 76-77.

And a collector of 77, generally speaking, is not popping into town on a Saturday morning to browse the local stamp shop in quite the way he might have in his youth.

It isn't a question of declining interest. It's a question of declining mobility, if anything.

So the result was inevitable, really.

As the footfall thinned (and the rents did not, in fact, they did the opposite), one by one, the shops closed.

But the collectors didn't go anywhere. They simply moved.

Onto the internet, onto philatelic platforms, onto auction houses that posted catalogues to them they could read in their own armchair, on their own time.

And the dealers who survived were the ones who saw it coming.

Which brings me, in a roundabout way, to Australia.

Stamp collectors and dealers in Australia have, for as long as I can remember, punched dramatically above their weight.

The country is a fraction of our population, and yet they are represented in almost every auction we run.

I have a theory about this.

When you are fourteen thousand miles from the centre of the market (which is, broadly, the UK and Europe), you get extraordinarily good at distance.

Catalogues, postal approvals, mail order, eventually the internet.

They had to adapt earlier than anyone else, because the alternative was not adapting at all.

So when the internet came along, they pounced on it.

A useful lesson, I think, for any business, not just ours.

If your physical venue is costing you too much, and your footfall is shrinking, and you haven't worked out how to make the shop a 'hub' rather than the whole operation, you are running a dying business.

Whether you sell stamps, or shoes, or anything else.

Take the high street, for instance.

The high street isn't dying because people stopped buying things.

If you're competing with Amazon and who knows what, on current rents, with current footfall, you are, as I sometimes put it, running down suicide alley.

Unless, that is, you've made the shop a hub rather than the whole operation.

With a physical presence and virtual reach.

The ones who worked that out are still standing.

We, for our part, have tried to take the same lesson on board.

Which is why our catalogues exist in two forms simultaneously.

At a cost approaching £57,000 each auction we send physical catalogues, printed, posted, and heavy enough to land on the doormat with a satisfying thud, for those who want to read it in the armchair, mark it up with a pen, and keep it as a reference.

And we also have an online version, for those who want to browse from wherever they happen to find themselves.

You can request the printed version [HERE](#), or browse online from the same link once available.

(But do note, if you are a regular bidder, you do not need to request a catalogue - we'll send you one automatically.)

Best wishes,

Andrew

Andrew McGavin  
Managing Director, Universal Philatelic  
Auctions

Andrew promoting philately on The Alan Titchmarsh Show