

10th May 2022

Stamps

“All science is either physics or stamp collecting.”

Ernest Rutherford, in 'Rutherford in Manchester' by J B Birks

I'm not sure what point the New Zealand physicist, Ernest Rutherford, was making in the quotation above. More research needed, I think. But I know that stamp collecting still rates as an important pastime for many people. When my uncle died and I was disposing of his possessions, I came across a stamp album, meticulously laid out, which he'd obviously used extensively in his youth. I had no idea the significance or the value of the stamps in his collection. But a dealer suggested some of them might be quite rare. So the album was donated to the Edinburgh *Christian Aid* Book Fair, in the hope that it might be purchased by a collector.

With the extensive use of emails, WhatsApp and texts these days, along with Facetime, Skype and Zoom calls, writing and sending letters that need stamps is less common than it used to be. The cost of a First Class stamp for an ordinary letter in the UK is now 95p, with Second Class post being 68p, with comparable prices in the USA, France and Germany. Is that why writing and posting letters has become less common?

Yet is there not something delightful about getting a letter, postcard, or parcel, with a stamp on it? No, not the printed stickers from the Post Office, or the pre-paid envelopes as part of a Company's mass-mailing. I mean a letter with a proper stamp, a stamp that someone has paid for so that the letter can be sent officially and delivered safely; a stamp that's been stuck on beside your address, by their own hand; a stamp that carries an important message where it's supposed to go.

The first stamps were authorised for use in the UK in 1840. So, the next time you post a letter or receive one with a stamp on it, don't just think of the cost, or how much easier it would have been to send an email; don't dig out your mobile phone to reply with a text or a WhatsApp message. Why not give thanks for 180 years of letters with stamps, and be grateful for the time and care we take to communicate with each other.

Now, where's that book of stamps I bought last week? I've got some letters to write, which will need these stamps to get them delivered safely.

A prayer for today

The stamp of your approval, Lord? All I need is the smile of your acceptance. Amen

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