

Thoughts from the Manse 18th September 2020



I wonder if you collected stamps as a child. I remember buying a cheap stamp album with a page for most countries of the world and then buying packets of stamps, sometimes from a specific country, other times an assortment. They were pocket money packets, probably pre-decimal at 3d or 6d. Then came the fun of sticking them in. There must have been thousands of such albums recycled through the years.

For some of us it was the start of a hobby, maybe many years later, when we began to appreciate these miniature works of art and collect specific items, often on a theme. My theme followed on from my love of children's books and I began collecting stamps that depicted fairy tales or children's literature. I would visit local stamps fairs and scour stalls and books for stamps. I bought a second hand copy of the Stanley Gibbons catalogue for 1985 and spent hours looking through it to see which countries had issued stamps with fairy tales or children's literature, creating my own specialised catalogue and then going hunting for these specific stamps.

On one occasion I went to London for the day and visited stamp shops on The Strand, along with a visit to Foyles bookshop. In the bookshop I found a copy of a wonderful Chinese Fairy Tale called Gu Dong, my day was complete when I found a set of stamps with the same story depicted, although listed under another name.



Recently, Royal mail have issued a set of stamps commemorating Rupert Bear, so that has been added to the collection, as well as a set of Sherlock stamps. This latter drew comments from my daughters who said it was not a children's story. I argued my case that I had read Sherlock Holmes short stories as a young teenager, or as it is called today in literary circles a young adult. We did not have that category and progressed naturally from Children's books to adult books. I remember getting my adult borrower's card from the library at the age of fourteen, but I bought a second-hand collection of Sherlock Holmes stories before then and had progressed to Agatha Christie before then also. Another demonstration of times changing.

Many of my stamps depict fairy tales from around the world, so I also have a collection of fairy tale books so that I can find out the stories behind the stamps. One day, I will create a proper collection but for now most of my collection is still in bags and shoeboxes awaiting display. I think the fun for me is in the finding. I also scour my change for special 50p pieces! Although that may be a fading hobby as it seems we are using coins far less these days, especially at the moment.



I look forward to getting back to the chase and also to creating something that I can share with others. It is not about the value but about the art, and of course the memories. The people I met at stamp fairs, and the conversations about a shared interest. My father-in-law began stamp collecting later in life and we enjoyed looking out for stamps which may be of interest to each other.

Collecting, of any kind, is not necessarily about money, but about an interest that you can share with others. Do you have a collection? When was the last time you shared a conversation with someone about that interest? It is part of your story, part of who you are, and we are called to share our story, and it is about more than a faith journey it is about our identity and what makes us who we are. Your hobbies are a part of your identity, part of who you are in God. We can use our hobbies to begin a conversation, to build relationships and as we talk people may learn about our faith.