

Introduction

According to historians, in the 6th century BC there already existed an official correspondence transport service in Egypt; it was in China, however, in the 3rd century BC, that the world's first organised postal service was put in place. This was also the first to use paper correspondence.

By the end of the 17th century, virtually every country had its official postal service, as well as private postal services organised by traders for transfer of their correspondence. It was in France that, for the first time, the State took direct control, in 1625, of organising and running the postal services.

However, in the era before the appearance of postage stamps, known as prephilately, the sending of correspondence posed serious problems, since it was the recipient who had to pay for the service, and more often than not the addressee would attempt to avoid paying. A solution to this problem was proposed in 1840 by an English schoolteacher, named Rowland Hill, who came up with the idea of having the person sending the letter pay, along with the use of adhesive labels to affix to the envelope by way of confirmation that payment had been made up-front.

On 14 September 1839, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer hosted a competition to submit proposals for an adhesive postage stamp. 2,700 projects were submitted, with Benjamin Cheverton's the one ultimately to be selected. The stamps were issued on 6 May 1840, with the "penny black" being the world's first adhesive postage stamp to go into circulation, or at least the oldest stamp to have been found, and which appears in the Yvert et Tellier Catalogue. The basic topic appearing on this stamp is the profile of a female head, representing Great Britain, which was repeated on all English stamps dating from the 19th century until they were replaced in 1902 by the bust of Edward VII, after over a hundred of them had been issued.

The stamp's success was such that, within the space of ten years following the date of the first one, stamps had already been established in the majority of countries: the Swiss cantons of Geneva and Zurich (1842), Brazil (1843), the canton of Basel (1845), the United States (1845), Belgium (1849), Austria (1850), France (1850), Italy (1850), and Prussia (1850). Spain did so by way of

the Royal Decree of 25 October 1849, which came into force on 1/1/1850. In the year 1860, the only countries left out were Greece (1861), Hungary (1867), Japan (1872), China (1878) and a few others.

The motif on the first stamps was usually the bust of the king, where the country's political system was a monarchy, otherwise the country's coat of arms, always surrounded by a fairly wide border or else adorned with an allegorical figure. Before long, they went on to include personalities and state issues, and subsequently, still in the 19th and early 20th centuries, stamps began to be used as a means of propagating historical facts, paying homage or announcing works or performances of national significance.

In Spain, this concept was used for the first time on a series of ten values commemorating the third centenary of the publishing of Don Quixote, and which went on sale from 1st until 15th May 1905, solely for internal use within Madrid. A stamp for regular use under this criterion did not appear in Spain until 1920, which was when a series of 13 values was issued to mark the 5th Universal Postal Union Congress in Madrid. These bore the bust of Alphonse XIII and the corresponding legend, and featured the Palace of Communications at Plaza de "La Cibeles" in Madrid. It should be pointed out, however, that Spain and the United Kingdom were the countries that took the longest to use stamps for promotional purposes.

The topic of statistics appeared for the first time on a series of Japanese 1.5 and 3 sen stamps (1 sen = 0.01 yen) issued in 1920 to mark the carrying out of the first Population Census in modern times. The face of the stamp portrayed a noble in period costume, apparently a senior dignitary of the emperor Jinmu (7th century BC), indicating that in those times some population counts were already being carried out, and that these were entrusted to someone important.

In Spain, the first stamp on this topic dates back to the year 1956, emblazoned with "Centenary of Statistics", which is somewhat ambiguous, as it is necessary to consult other sources to learn that it actually refers to the centenary of the Royal Decree of 3/11/1856, which led to the creation of the Commission of General Statistics of the Kingdom, the first state body to take the word statistic as part of its name, since its role was previously entrusted to the so-called "Oficina de la Balanza", the regulation of which dates back to 1802, but at that time the word statistic did not form part of the Spanish vocabulary.

Issues have multiplied since the 1920s as a result of expansion of postal

services: airmail, priority, rates, parcel, press, documents, official services, etc. There was an unprecedented growth at that time, due in part to the influence of collecting.

The hobby of collecting postage stamps had begun at the very moment they were introduced for franking correspondence. Immediately after their first appearance, John Edward Gray, an official at the British Museum, had already begun to collect them in 1840, and even requested them by means of an advertisement published in *The Times* newspaper in 1841.

The hobby of collecting stamps gradually spread to such a degree that by the end of the 1850s, the hobby of philately was widespread among the cream of English society.

The hobby then spread from England to Belgium, France and Germany. In France, Potiquet published in December 1861 the first *Catalogue de timbres poste*, followed two months later by the *Manuel du collectionneur de timbres poste*, closely followed by the Laplante, Klin, Gray, Statford, Smith catalogues or manuals, to name but a few.

These coincided with the founding of special newspapers carrying news about the appearance of new stamps. The first such newspaper came out in December 1862 in Liverpool, entitled *The Stamp Collector's Review and Monthly Advertiser*. Henceforth there was a deluge of French, German, Belgian etc. publications. The first one in Spain was the *Manual del coleccionista de sellos de correo*, by José María Vergés (Barcelona 1864). By 1910 there were already eight hundred different publications in the world, of which Spain accounted for more than fifty. Fervour for stamp collecting was such that these years saw the setting up in all towns and villages of weekly stamp fairs.

Collecting, in turn, stimulated the issuing of stamps dealing many more themes, most of which were unrelated to the postal service or the issuing country, in extreme cases not even being usable for postal franking, such as occurs with "blocks", normally of four stamps on which the topical image covers the surface of them all; the "leaves", of which the stamp only occupied a part; brand-new postmarked stamps, and even stamps on which the postal value is not shown. In other words, postage stamps which had lost their postal purpose, becoming cards for collectors.

Conversely, having to affix stamps was bothersome to large companies, leading them to come up with special methods for them, such as "Agreed postage", "Postal reply coupon", certification of the person in charge of the

record in official correspondence, delivery by hand at post offices, and franking machines. If, moreover, it is considered that the generalisation of new means of communication has left by the wayside those using stamps by a proportion not exceeding 1%, it should be expected that the stamp were in the process of disappearing. So then, save for the last few years during which, for very limited and perhaps temporary reasons, their evolution has stopped in its tracks, the number of issues had increased spectacularly in the last five years. By our calculations, there were around 133 territories which had reached a thousand issues of stamps by the end of the 20th century. If we only look at these countries, we find that out of 267,922 different stamps issued, well over half, 161,664, were issued in the last 25 years.

Stamps have almost lost their original purpose, although they have spawned a new worldwide craze, Philately, which according to the Royal Spanish Academy Dictionary is "the hobby of collecting and studying postage stamps".

The number of collectable items in Philately possibly exceeds half a million, therefore each collector sets the conditions to be met by stamps of interest to him or her, which in stamp collector-speak is known as a "topic" and "topic-based philately".

Fondness of collecting together with an interest in statistical topics has led the INE Historical Statistics Unit to publish this small collection of stamps on the topic of Statistics in a general sense, which include: general population studies, economic and social studies, representative figures of administrative statistics, of theoretical statistics and chorography, promoters of statistics, bodies, congresses, celebrations and similar issues... With these criteria, the application of which in some cases may be somewhat subjective, proponents of collecting have comprehensively reviewed stamps issued throughout the 20th century, and have compiled practically all the ones matching these types, with only a few left to include due to them being unavailable.

We have endeavoured to accompany each image with a description of the reason for its issue and the topic, explanations which are sometimes plainly obvious, but which in other cases may be enlightening. The country, year of issue and code are also detailed in the Yvert catalogue. This is none other than a means of placing emphasis on what is no more than a series of coloured images, which are evocative of a topic that has constituted our field of work and keen dedication.