Traditional Philately

The Evolution of Philatelic Classes

Originally there were no separate exhibiting categories or Classes. Collectors had been fascinated by the advent of postage stamps to pre pay mail, and began collecting these attractive little labels. As displaying these stamps, and then exhibiting them competitively came into vogue, it was all about the material. Mostly about how complete the particular collection was, with little or no emphasis on how it was displayed (what we call Presentation today), or how it was described (what we call Treatment today). Certainly very little, or probably no indication of what we know as Knowledge or Personal Research today. Condition and Rarity were just about the only criteria as we understand them today that played any role at all.

As interest began to grow in collecting other aspects of philately, like postmarks, or postage routes and rates, specific aspects of philately were extracted to form new specialist philatelic exhibiting classes, such as Postal History. As enthusiasm for other aspects of philately grew, each wanted to be independent and focus entirely on their own interests, like Postal Stationery, Revenue Philately, or Aerophilately. As each of these formed their own collecting and exhibiting categories or Classes and developed their own rules and regulations, the residue of bits and pieces of philatelic material not fitting into any of these new Classes remained in the Traditional Philately "pot", along with the original postage stamps.

The name Traditional Philately is, with the benefit of hindsight, perhaps an unfortunate choice of name. Yes, the first collections and exhibits were of

postage stamps, and since these usually make up the most important aspect of Traditional Philately, it is easy to understand why the term Traditional Philately was used for collections and exhibits of postage stamps. However, the word 'traditional' implies something that is perhaps rather quaint and old fashioned. All the other exhibiting Classes have names specifically related to their subject therefore sound more modern and progressive in their approach than something that could be seen as quaint and old fashioned and traditional. As a result many exhibitors and potential exhibitors tend to regard Traditional Philately as stuffy, with rather rigid and outdated rules. The reality is just the opposite!

What is Traditional Philately?

In simple terms, it is all about postage stamps and anything else that **does not fit into the other exhibiting Classes**, and, of course, also everything else that **does fit into the other exhibiting Classes**. These other pieces left in the Traditional Philately "pot" include a number of what may sometimes be considered as "fringe" philatelic material, usually too small to justify having a separate Class. These could include things like Registration Labels, or Censor Labels, or telegraph stamps.

In addition, the rules for Traditional Philately exhibits are amongst the most flexible of all the exhibiting Classes, with all types of philatelic material permitted, provided it is used in the right context. For example, postage stamps and proofs are not generally welcome in Postal History or Postal Stationery exhibits by virtue of the relatively narrower definition of philatelic material that fits into these exhibition Classes. However, covers and

postal stationery items are not only permitted in a Traditional Philately exhibit if appropriately used, but are encouraged, if they serve to complete the story of the chosen subject for that philatelic exhibit.



Figure 1. Traditional Philately exhibits can not only include material that does not fit into any other exhibiting Class, but also all types of material that **do** fit into other exhibiting Classes. This postcard from Borneo could be used in a Postal Stationery or Postal History exhibit, but it could also be demonstrating the use of the particular overprinted postage stamp in a Traditional Philately exhibit.

The Traditional Philately Exhibit

Traditional Philately is usually about the study of postage stamps. While having the broadest scope of all the exhibiting categories, allowing all aspects of philately to be included in one form or another, the focus remains the postage stamps. All other philatelic aspects should support the basic story of the postage stamps in some way. The classical Traditional Philately exhibit may have pre-stamp material as an introduction to demonstrate why stamps of a specific value were needed, followed by printers archive items, like essays and proofs,

showing how the stamps were developed. Then the stamps themselves, used and unused in multiples and positional pieces, along with any printing varieties. Then finally the usage of the stamps on cover, demonstrating why they were needed, preferably ones with interesting postmarks and destinations.



Figure 2. Die proof from De La Rue for the first Union of South Africa definitive stamps with uncleared surrounds and blank value tablets.

The ideal exhibit should have a balance between the different philatelic aspects, with the core being the postage stamps. However, a collector should always be able to exhibit his or her passion, even if it forms a somewhat unbalanced exhibit. For example, for narrow subjects like a single issue or set of stamps, or for a small country with very limited issues, the story may need to include pre adhesive stamp mail, or a considerable amount of interesting usage. Those who collect this way may not have enough postal history or other material to fit into another exhibiting category, but they can

exhibit their material in the Traditional Philately category.



Figure 3. Positional piece of the Union of South Africa, a corner block of the ½d showing the plate number, which also has a perforation fold variety.

In the special regulations for evaluation of Traditional Philately (SREV) issued by the FIP it indicates that "Traditional philately embraces all aspects of philately". These special regulations should be carefully read, as they do define in some detail what constitutes a Traditional Philately exhibit.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT

ABPS c/o RPSL 15 Abchurch Lane London EC4N 7BW $_{
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E-mail: communications@abps.org.uk
Internet: www.abps.org.uk





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