

Social Philately

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Though the Social Philately was introduced by Australia in 1980s, officially it was first introduced in the Melbourne International Philatelic Exhibition 'Australia 99' as an experimental competitive class and it proved immensely popular. In November 2000 it was included in a British exhibition for the first time and has since spread like wildfire.

Social philately is one of the fastest growing form of exhibiting and more and more collectors are turning to it, since it offers scope and imagination to the collector whilst preserving the basic philatelic disciplines.

But what is it exactly? If we want to define Social Philately in single sentence we can say that Social Philately is the Social History told by way of mail and ephemera (pamphlets, notices, hand bills, tickets etc.). In other words Social Philately is a collection of postal articles including philatelic and non-philatelic but related material. It represents a study of the development of social systems and products derived from the operation of postal systems. It is the exhibiting of materials and artifacts that illustrate either the social reaction to the presence of a universal and rapidly developing postal system, or the development and diversification of a social activity or enterprise.

Social Philately exhibit consists of a wide range of material directly related to the operations and products of the postal system either as post office equipment or as material developed by commerce to use or reflect postal services and products. Non philatelic material must have an intimate connection with the operation or the objective of postal system or if not directly related to the postal system then it should have an integral part of social system (for example medals awarded to trade fair participants where the medal was often posted but where the connection is more with the social story).

In Social Philately Exhibit one can include examples of (1) Telegram Services, (2) Greeting Cards, (3) Pictorial or Illustrated Commercial Covers (including Patriotic Covers), (4) Stationery used by Post Offices (without imprinted stamp), (5) Philatelic History other than literature (including albums hinges, perforation gauges etc), (6) Officially issued documents bearing illustrations of postage stamps, (7) Pictorial View Cards and objects associated with postage stamps and their use, (8) Aspects of the affect of the postal system on commerce or industry, (9) Locality studies based on postal and social history using the materials of Social Philately, (10) Objects associated with postage stamps and their use (weighing balances for letters, stamp boxes, maps, prints, model post office, model letter boxes etc.) (11) Post Office equipments (mailbags, uniforms, postal tools, medals etc). This material should be arranged so as to illustrate a balanced plan as a whole or to develop any aspect of Social Philately.

In Social Philately exhibit one can tell the story of the development of a town or country by using appropriate material, same way the background to some historical event can be brought to life in this manner. Of course the history of a region or country will be more important than a similar exhibit for a small town or village. Also the development of commerce and trade through the usage of postal history and postal material can be narrated.

Social Philately Exhibit must contain an introductory plan showing the scope and development of the exhibit. The title of the exhibit should correspond to the introductory plan. The plan should give general information on the subject and must indicate areas of personal investigation. It should also contain a short list of the important documentary sources (social and philatelic) used. It will help the judges to evaluate the material shown in relation to the aims set forth by the exhibitor.

The plan or introductory page and the development of exhibit are the two aspects of an interlinked process, based on the personal study and research by the collector on both the social theme and the material. The exhibit must elaborate the theme in depth, and should comply with the introductory page. Creativity, the personal development of new themes and originality, the introduction of new aspects or approaches are key elements of Social Philately exhibits. A thorough knowledge of both the theme and the appropriate material is a prerequisite for the best possible social philatelic development. The social information should provide the main thread of the story. It is necessary to include philatelic information where required so that philatelic knowledge and personal study can be demonstrated. It is advisable to keep the social and philatelic information separated or at least easily distinguishable one from another.

A general rule should be that a Social Philately exhibit should show philatelically and socially related interesting material to the best advantage, and not appear to be a manuscript for a monograph or a loose collection of social interesting items.

While preparing Social Philately exhibit one must also keep in mind that non philatelic material in the Exhibit should not comprise more than 40 to 50% of the exhibit. Also care should be taken that if non philatelic material which is not linked to the postal system is necessary in the exhibit then it should have importance to the social aspects of the exhibit and such material should not comprise more than 10% of the material. Exhibits should be planned chronologically, geographically, by type of artifact, or by social custom. Large scale duplication of similar items, large chronological gaps and the inclusion of expensive items not directly relevant to the subject shown must be avoided.

Here are few examples of Social Philately Exhibits - 'Wartime Postal Forgeries', 'Promotional Postal Orders', 'Mulready Caricatures', 'The Post Office Savings Bank', 'Images of Industry', 'The Sociology of Reading', 'Hand-illustrated Letters', 'Airmail in India', 'The Post Office Story' 'Patriotic Mails', 'Money Order Services', 'The Road

towards Indian Independence', 'Red Cross - Support the World', 'Kolkata - Social Philately' (One can develop exhibit on any city or town). This may help readers to think about titles and theme of Social Philately Exhibits. One Frame or Multiple frames Exhibit on Social Philately can be developed on any subject or class. It depends on collector's own imagination, ideas and skill. Research is essential for developing Social Philately Exhibits.

An Exhibit 'The Sydney Harbour Bridge' of Maurice Williams of Sydney, a former Chairman of Australia Post is a five-frame exhibit which coincided with the 75th Anniversary of the Opening of the Bridge on 19th March 1932. This is a beautifully presented exhibit combining stamps, postcards, photographs and ephemeral items to tell the story of the construction and impact of Sydney's iconic bridge.

'Art through the post' is an exhibit of Hand-Painted envelopes which talented Victorian artists sent through the post to friends and relatives. They were probably inspired to use postal correspondence in this way by William Mulready who designed Britain's first postal stationery and thus pioneered the idea of illustrated envelopes.

Because of the nature of the material which falls within the scope of Social Philately an exhibit may be presented without using frames. In such cases the exhibitor must decide on the appropriate method of display and provide such display systems provided there is agreement on the method chosen with the organising committee of the relevant exhibition. Due to practical limitations, organizers also impose certain restrictions for exhibiting Social Philately Exhibits. Either they only allow the entries that can be mounted and displayed on standard display frames or specifically they mention that like non-philatelic material should not be thicker than 5 mm to fit into the standard exhibition frames.

Internationally, Social Philately is judged using the following criteria:

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| Treatment (20) and Importance (5 for philatelic and 5 for social) | 30 |
| Philatelic and related Social Knowledge, Personal Study and Research | 35 |
| Condition (10) and Rarity (20) | 30 |
| Presentation | 5 |
| Total | 100 |

Social Philately presents a wonderful challenge for anyone wishing to expand the scope of their collection but of course research and imagination is required to develop social philately exhibit. In India there is little development about Social Philately and I appeal to my all philatelist friends to explore this category of philately as a challenge and develop wonderful exhibit on Social Philately.