

Invitation to a local stamp society competition led to an unexpected victory and paved the way to a lifetime enthusiasm for Egypt sparked by a hidden bonus in a father's reward for academic success



Why I collect Egypt – Neil Hitchens (ESC 651) – Woking, Surrey

Like many of our members, my love for Egyptian philately happened almost by chance. Today it seems comical that Central London and The City - where my father worked - were once dotted with physical shops selling stamps from every corner of the globe. I was fortunate to enjoy the final years of this "Golden Period," which flourished from the turn of the 20th century before vanishing almost completely a decade later.



For me, the local "mecca" was the premises of Healey and Wise at St Paul's Churchyard. I was doubly lucky that the old General Post Office and the National Postal Museum were just up the road with current GB and presentation packs easily accessible - a moment in time soon to be erased from living memory.

The reward for passing my Common Entrance exam was a special visit to Healey and Wise, where I was allowed to spend £10 on "something new". My father had "helpfully" set aside eight album pages of mixed Ottoman Turkey and tucked at the back were two pages of Egypt: mint Farouk commemoratives. At just £1 a sheet, it was a bargain. That Christmas I also received the Gibbons Central Asia catalogue and a photostat of 30 pages of Egypt SG listings.



The summer holidays that year were hot and spent mostly outdoors. The defining moment came however when I received my City Library card and found a section on stamp collecting, with Gibbons catalogues from the 1950s and 60s, back issues of *Stamp Monthly*, and a collection of other stamp books marked by charm and eccentricity.

This grounding in the basics helped me understand the stamps of a single country. I learned how to mount stamps

properly - **never** use a hinge on a mint stamp - and grasped the importance of colour variations, perforations, centring and clear presentation. Through these stamps I discovered the history of Egypt from the Napoleonic era, seeing how major events were celebrated through commemoratives.

That spring the local stamp society held a single-sheet competition. A school staff member mentioned my interest to the local society, and I was invited to enter even though not a member. My enthusiasm had been noted, so I spent the weekend scouring my small collection for two sets that interested me.

I trotted off to the local stamp shop for guidance, bought a small packet of SG Simplex pages, and, in my best schoolboy handwriting, wrote up a presentation, combining SG listings with details from the 1972 Zeheri and *Stamp Monthly* articles. My display featured the 1946 Arab League Congress at Inshas (*left above*) and the 1947 25th International Exhibition of Fine Arts.

●We welcome all members' stories for this intriguing column