When I was 6, I was given a stamp album by my grandfather. At the time I was more interested in Medieval & Roman coins, solid and patinated metal, rather than the small modern pieces of paper, so the stamps were put away.

In 2018, now 13, I watched the Grand Budapest Hotel: a movie I fell in love with for its beautiful Eastern-European scenery and place names inspired by those in Germany and Austria.

Wanting to know more about the movie’s princely family ‘Desgoffe-und-Taxis’, I stumbled upon the real postal service *Thurn und Taxis*, which the film used almost word for word. Clearly the inspiration. The *Thurn und Taxis* was a postal monopoly that sent mail across Europe before Germany established a postal service of its own.

I was intrigued. So, I bought some stamps.

My first purchase was from the company, issued before its transfer in 1867 to Prussia, and their ornate, brightly coloured designs, bold numerals, and ring postmarks captured me. They embodied a time when people cared more about the artistic element of their stamps, very unlike today’s self-adhesive stickers mass-produced by machines in red and blue.

Unlike coins, paintings, or antiques, stamps tell a deeper personal story - they tell the tale of a single person, sending a letter to another. A unique communication. They tell a story so intimate, a doorway into the lives of the long dead; an intrusion into private matters between rival companies, a love letter from a heartbroken Regency suitor, a naval document for a fleet of ships ambushing Napoleon.

The stamps of the Thurn und Taxis aren’t worth much money, because so many were printed. What they are worth is the history behind them.

Since the medieval period, mail has existed through wars, sieges, disasters, and even plagues.

While coins are produced one year, and used for decades after, mail is much different.

Every day, a postman must be there to collect and send the mail, in each town, village, and city. Using whichever stamps and postmarks are present, and following the postal rates of the year, leaving each letter unique.

