



VIDEOGAME

In January, Royal Mail premiered a set of retro gaming stamps. While the UK was the first country to first issue postage stamps, it was not the first to issue videogame stamps, which has an uncoordinated history dating over three decades

Words By Michael Barron



» It's unsurprising that a character as popular as Mario would end up getting celebrated as a stamp set.



» [NES] A number of licensed videogames, including Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, have been immortalised in stamp form.

The first stamp to feature a videogame dates back to 1988 with *Pac-Man* as part of the Dutch Youth Care Campaign series of three stamps.

Two years later in 1990 Israel issued a set of three stamps. Each one was devoted to an individual computer game, and *Chess*, *Volleyball* and *Car Races* were celebrated in all their 8-bit glory. The Nineties would see a few videogame stamps from unassuming nations like Uganda, Guernsey, Central African Republic and Palau, but the majority of these sets would not see the light of day until the turn of the century.

The history of videogame stamps is intertwined with individual nations' fascination with technology, particularly early computers. In 1987 India celebrated 100 years of Service To The Blind by issuing one stamp out of a set of two with a computer, demonstrating how computers can help those who are disadvantaged in society. In the same year, Australia issued a set of four stamps celebrating microchips and robotics amongst other technological innovations. Philatelists (stamp collectors) themselves have been widely using microcomputers to assist with stamp collecting since the early Eighties.

The advent of the 21st century saw a different approach to gaming. Previously, people – mostly

children and teenagers – celebrated games as something new. But as time went on they began to commemorate gaming as something that has been normalised as a part of everyday living and a pastime for adults as well as children. With the advancement of computers and growing popularity of video-sharing platforms such as YouTube, videogame enthusiasts have used the template of the humble postage stamp to design their own videogame-themed stamps whilst sharing step-by-step guides for others to make their own designs.

Online platforms such as DeviantArt – where users upload their stamp designs, among many other art forms – are in such high demand they have strict rules limiting the number of daily uploads. Rules also cover stamp design which must have the appropriate 'teeth' surrounding them. People in the USA – despite the country not issuing a complete set of videogame-themed stamps – have caught onto the idea that people want to design (or get graphic designers to create) their own personal stamps and send them out to their social circles through Zazzle.

The biggest, oldest and geographically dispersed videogame-related stamp designs are linked to titles that are based on TV shows or comic books. For instance the comic book series *Asterix* by Goscinny

» If our editor had a job creating videogame stamps, odds are they'd end up looking very similar to this [I'd add feathers, though - Ed].



» [Wii U] A large number of Nintendo games feature collectible stamps. Here's a selection from NES Remix.

STAMPS of the world



» A number of stamps were released in France in 2005 celebrating popular franchises like *Zelda*, *Rayman* and *Spyro*.

and Uderzo was first made into a videogame in 1983 by Atari. Before the end of the 20th century 18 *Asterix* videogame titles had been released. In 1992 Guernsey issued its first *Asterix* stamp. In 1999, France issued a single stamp and a mini-sheet. Belgium followed suit in 2005. Ten years later, Deutsche Post issued its own *Asterix* stamp set.

In 1990, Capcom released the videogame *Chip 'N Dale Rescue Rangers* based on the Disney TV series. Whilst countries including Redonda, Caicos Islands, Gambia and the Maldives had previously issued *Chip 'N Dale*-themed stamps, countries including Saint Vincent were inspired by the game and released their own stamps in 1992. In 1989 Konami released the first *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* game on the NES (1990 on Amiga, Amstrad CPC, Atari ST, Commodore 64, PC and ZX Spectrum) based on the original Eighties children's cartoon series. The 25th anniversary of the original TV series and 20th anniversary as a videogame prompted anniversary stamp issues in 2009 in Palau, Gambia and Saint Vincent.

One of the most fascinating stamp crazes is partly owed to the legacy of the *Discworld* series of games released in 1995 and 1996 based on the *Discworld* books by the late Sir Terry Pratchett. Since the issue of the first stamp in 2004 'Flatlanders' have collected stamps which now comprise of two volumes of stamp catalogues. The ongoing interest in these stamps based on the descriptions in the *Discworld* books (especially *Going Postal*) is partly down to the stamp designers adding lots of special little printing errors known as 'sports'.

Videogames and stamps have become so intertwined that stamps have been incorporated into videogames themselves. Nintendo has created so many games with stamps there is a wiki page dedicated to them. On *NES Remix* alone gamers can collect 100 different stamps. These are unlocked by collecting 'Bits' earned from completing challenges and achieving high scores. Stamps can be used to create

unique Miiverse posts from within the game. Each one has an 8-bit retro design from NES classics bordered with trimmed teeth.

As classic videogames have become more established in our culture, a plethora of anniversary issues have been released. In 2006 Japan commemorated the tenth anniversary of *Resident Evil* and the fifth anniversary of *Devil May Cry*. 11 years later, the 30th anniversaries of *Street Fighter* and *Mega Man* (known as *Rockman* in Japan) were released on the same day on 20 November 2017. With a price tag of ¥5,400 (or roughly \$50) for the *Mega Man* issue alone, these commemorative sets were not marketed for everyday use and as a result sold out quickly.

Apart from the likes of Japan and Belgium, few countries have continuously issued videogame-themed stamps. This is disappointing, because stamp issues globally galvanise international interest amongst gamers and philatelists alike. Hopefully following Royal Mail's latest set celebrating the iconic work of British game developers, we can encourage more videogame stamps packages in the near future. ★

» The Royal Mail's recent series of stamps proved extremely popular with gamers.

