

## Stamp Production: Introductory Article

For Royal Mail's *Stamps and Collecting* Website

In the first of a new series, we start by introducing you to the world of stamp production with a timeline of the main processes and their characteristics before going into greater detail from next month.

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Five main processes have created British stamps since the Penny Black. This timeline shows date of first use, print characteristics and brief details.

- 1840 RECESS.** The design is incised into the printing plate, inked and transferred to the paper under pressure. Used by Perkins, Bacon and Petch to print the Penny Black, this is collectors 'process of choice' due to the incredible skill of the engraver and tactile feel of the stamp.
- 1855 LETTERPRESS.** The plate contains just the raised design area with the rest etched away, enabling the greasy ink to print the stamp. De La Rue first used this process to produce the Fourpenny Carmine and it was subsequently used through to 1934 and occasionally after that.
- 1934 GRAVURE.** Fluid inks are applied to the cylinder and held in microscopic cells before being transferred to paper. First employed by Harrison's, it is still the main process used. Originally involving photography in cylinder production, these are now computer-engraved.
- 1980 LITHOGRAPHY.** The design is transferred to a printing cylinder, ink sticks to the image area, while water protects the non-image area. The design is then offset onto a rubber blanket cylinder, which transfers the ink to the paper. Origins of 'litho' are old, but it is a relative newcomer to British stamp production, being first used by Waddington.
- 2001 SCREEN.** Ink is forced via a giant squeegee through a screen and on to paper. Rarely used for stamps, it was utilised by Enschedé with thermochromic ink on the Nobel Prizes issue.
- 20?? DIGITAL.** Britain has yet to print stamps digitally, but the day cannot be far off when this printing method enters the mainstream. It is currently used to print Smilers™ stamp labels.

[36 words in teaser and 312 in article] [Compiled by Glenn H Morgan FRPSL, 27 February 2007]