

# STAMP PRODUCTION – AN ISSUE IS BORN

For Royal Mail's *Stamps and Collecting* Website

Read about the fundamentals of what is involved in creating a postage stamp in this introductory article that will, over the coming months, explain and demystify the complex procedures.

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The previous series described the different printing processes at the disposal of a postal authority and we will now start to look at the 'pre-press' work, production elements and 'finishing' aspects.

We start our journey by briefly recording the basic stages required in getting a stamp into the hands of the public and stamp collectors, for production involves many complex stages prior to placing the stamps on sale. Unsurprisingly, the methods used to create a stamp involves practically the same actions the world over, whether it is Royal Mail placing an order for millions of each issue, or a small Pacific nation that is potentially ordering just a few thousand stamps.

- Subjects are chosen, artists briefed and printers commissioned.
- Concepts produced, designs approved and final artwork created.
- Pre-press work includes stepping design into sheets, adding marginal markings, ordering paper and ink, proofing, obtaining production approvals and creation of plates/cylinders.
- The production stage involves printing by sheet/web in required colours and adding security, decorative and operational requirements.
- Finishing includes perforating/die-cutting and guillotining to format, adding sheet numbers, plus examination of stock for errors.
- Post-production sees destruction of waste, counting, packing and shipping the stamps to the postal authority.
- The post office then validates the stock received and supplies appropriate quantities to its branch network and Philatelic Bureau.
- Finally, there is media publicity, provision of collector services, placing the stamps on sale and eventual withdrawal and destruction of any unsold stocks.

You cannot have a stamp without paper (although a few novelty stamps have been printed on textile, wood, metal, etc) and this is invariably chosen and ordered once the printing process has been decided because there can be a long lead-time if a specialist substrate is required.

[30 words in teaser and 304 in article] [Compiled by Glenn H Morgan FRPSL, 26 July 2007]