

Hey, Turn Me Over!

As Seen on the Back Side of a Stamp

by Tom Fortunato

**A presentation for the
Rochester Philatelic Association**

We philatelists have a habit of mainly concerning ourselves with what appears on the face of a stamp. But on a small fraction of the million-plus different postage stamps issued to date around the world you'll find something other than just blank paper and maybe gum—and I don't mean a hinge!

Here's a sample of some of the interesting and unexpected things you can discover just by turning stamps over.

A brief outline of categories being presented:

- Advertising
- Coinage
- Counters
- Descriptors
- Philatelic Marks
- Security
- Stamp Production
- Technology



In the beginning... It should come as no surprise that Great Britain, the originator of the postage stamp, would be the first to experiment with stamp underprints. Pilfering of stamps from businesses by employees was rampant. The Post Office offered to print a company's name on the reverse of a stamp in the color of the stamp, before gumming, to prove its ownership. Only five companies took part in the program, which ran from 1866-1882. Perkins, Bacon and Co. underprinted stamps until 1879, and De La Rue and Co. in the latter three years.

J. and C. Boyd & Co. 1866-1880 (Warehousemen)

W. H. Smith and Son 1867-1880 (Newsagents, stationers and booksellers)

Copestake, Moore, Crampton, & Co. 1867-1882

(Mail order company)

Oxford Union Society 1871-1880 (Oxford University debating society)

Great Eastern Railway 1873-1880 (Railway company)



The idea caught on and several firms made their own unofficial underprints by printing on top of the gum in black ink. Most were on Victorian issues, but at least two firms are known on Edward VII and George V stamps. An example of a printing roller offered for sale is here. Perfins eventually became the preferred anti-theft way to mark stamps.

"EVERETT"
THIEF-STAMP DETECTOR

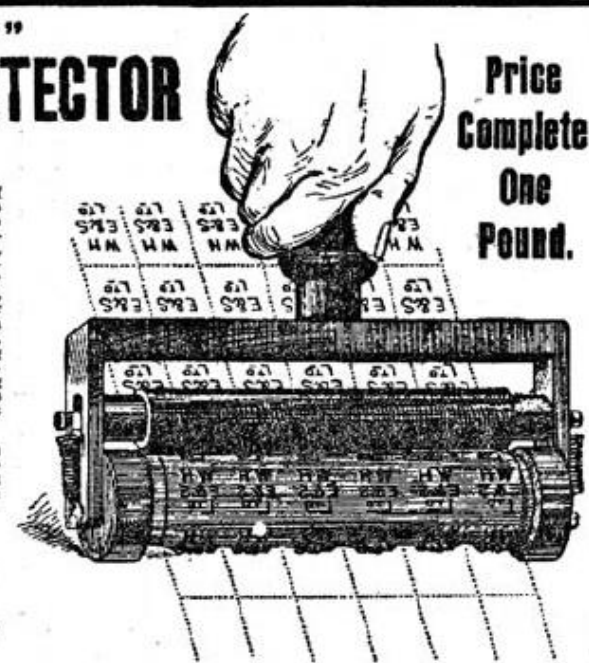
"THE TIMES" says—
"THE PILFERING OF POSTAGE STAMPS."
"Many big firms have suffered from the petty pilfering of postage stamps, and numerous devices have been formed with a view to checking the evil. By far the most salutary step in this direction has just been sanctioned by the Postmaster-General, who has given Messrs. W. H. Everett & Son, Ltd., permission to stamp their stamps on the back, and thus prevent them from being stolen. 'For fifteen years past,' they write to a contemporary, 'we have been trying to obtain this, and have at length succeeded.' The passage in the letter from the General Post Office giving the necessary permission runs as follows:—'If . . . you still consider it necessary, in order to prevent pilfering, to adopt the practice of printing your initials on the back of your postage stamps, the Postmaster-General will not withhold his assent to your taking this course; and in the event of your doing so, instructions shall be given to the effect that stamps printed on the back are not to be re-purchased at Post-offices.'"—*Times*."

Price (complete) One Pound.
* This is not one-tenth of the price of a safe, but is a hundred times more effective.

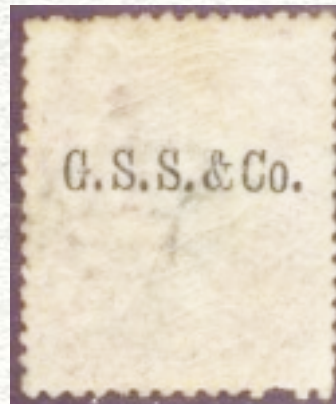
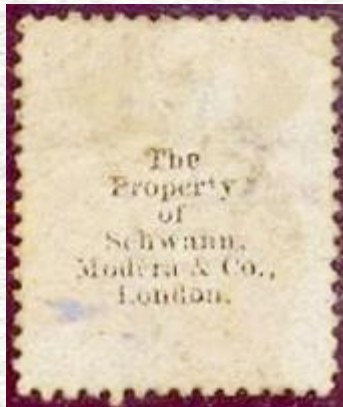
W. H. EVERETT & SON, LTD.,
Bell's Buildings, Salisbury Square, London, E.C.

"THE NEWSAGENT AND BOOKSELLERS' REVIEW" says—
TO CHECK THE POSTAGE-STAMP THIEF.
"Not satisfied with having done so much" (secured the consent of the Postmaster General to print on the backs of postage stamps), "Messrs. Everett have gone a step further, and made it possible for everyone to print his initials on the postage stamps himself. They have contrived a handy and clever little apparatus, which they call the 'Everett' Thief-stamp Detector, by means of which half a sheet of stamps can be printed in a few seconds. This they are prepared to supply at the extremely reasonable price of £1. Messrs. Everett will be pleased to furnish this 'trade' with particulars as to prices, &c."—*The Newsagent and Booksellers' Review*.

Price Complete One Pound.



A few unofficially printed examples are below.



Advertising

Pears' Soap advertisements were unofficially printed on the gum side of some British stamps from the 1880s by De La Rue and Company.



Perhaps knowing about GB's Pears' stamps, New Zealand Post and Telegraph saw money to be made. In July, 1892 an £800 contract was awarded to three businessmen to solicit advertisers and provide electrotypes for the future printing of advertisements on the pre-gummed reverse of the current set of definitives from 1d to 1 shilling. Three different advert settings were used on sheets of 240 stamps each. Black, blue, brown, red brown, red, green or lilac inks were used, with ads offering a wide variety of everyday products and services.

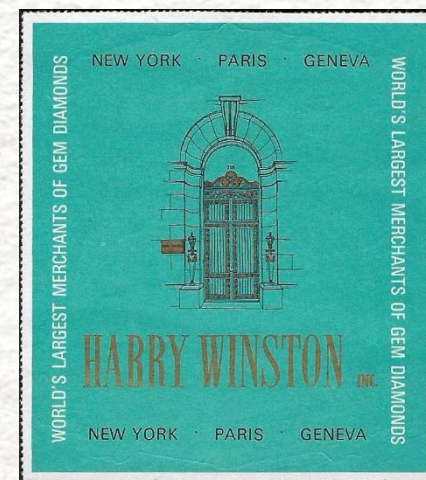
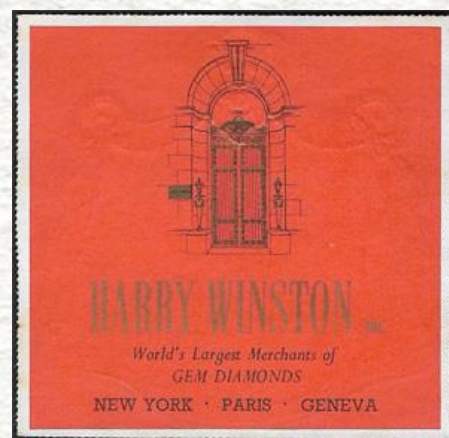
The first ad stamps were available in post offices in February 1893.



The campaign was a flop for the post office, cancelled after only 7½ months into the three year contract. The public was appalled that they were forced to view ads when licking a stamp. The ad ink and stamp gum did not bond well, resulting in partially sticking stamps, often needing brushed-on gum to adhere to an envelope.



Backing paper on die cut stamps and their peelable sheet were the perfect place for advertising.



Between 1962-67 the French pharmaceutical firm Laboratoire Veyron-Froment of Marseilles prepared mail to doctors advertising their products, including inexpensive stamps that they underprinted.



*de conception
entièrement nouvelle !*

arthrodont

première pâte gingivale anti-inflammatoire
fait cesser très rapidement
les crises gingivo-dentaires douloureuses
des parodontopathies.

Appliqué en brossage ou en massage des gencives, l'ARTHRODONT entraîne une sédation rapide et durable des phénomènes subjectifs, et essentiellement de la douleur : douleur aiguë de la crise, hyperesthésie chronique intercritique des gencives, sensibilité au contact, paresthésies (sensation de dent allongée), prurit. De plus, il agit sur gingivorragies de toute origine.

Cette action originale est due à l'acide glycyrrhétinique. Extrait de la réglisse, cet acide exerce sur les manifestations inflammatoires une action marquée comparable à celle de la cortisone. Comme les dérivés cortisoniques, il développe des propriétés anti-allergiques. Mais à l'encontre de la cortisone et de ses dérivés il ne présente aucune toxicité.

Par ailleurs, l'acide glycyrrhétinique exerce une action bactériostatique locale dont sont dépourvus les dérivés hormonaux anti-inflammatoires.

MODE D'EMPLOI :
L'ARTHRODONT s'emploie en massage ou en brossage des gencives 2 à 3 fois par jour. Chaque fois que cela est possible laisser la pâte gingivale en contact avec la muqueuse pendant 5 à 10 minutes avant le rinçage.

Tube de 40 g — acide glycyrrhétinique 1 % — formaldéhyde 0,10 % — p. cl. 4

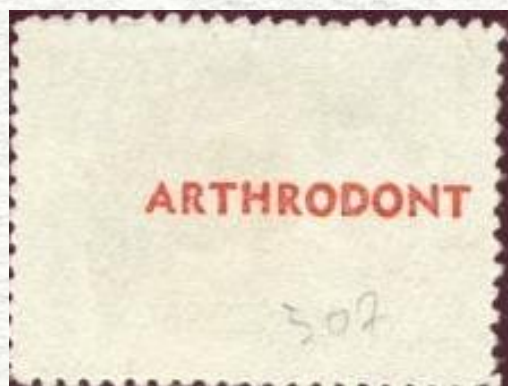
LABORATOIRE VEYRON-FRONENT — 72-80, Rue Monte-Cristo — 13 - MARSEILLE IV
Imprimerie Belle-de-Mai - Marseille

Be on the lookout for stamps from this time period for examples like these, which command high premiums when identified properly.

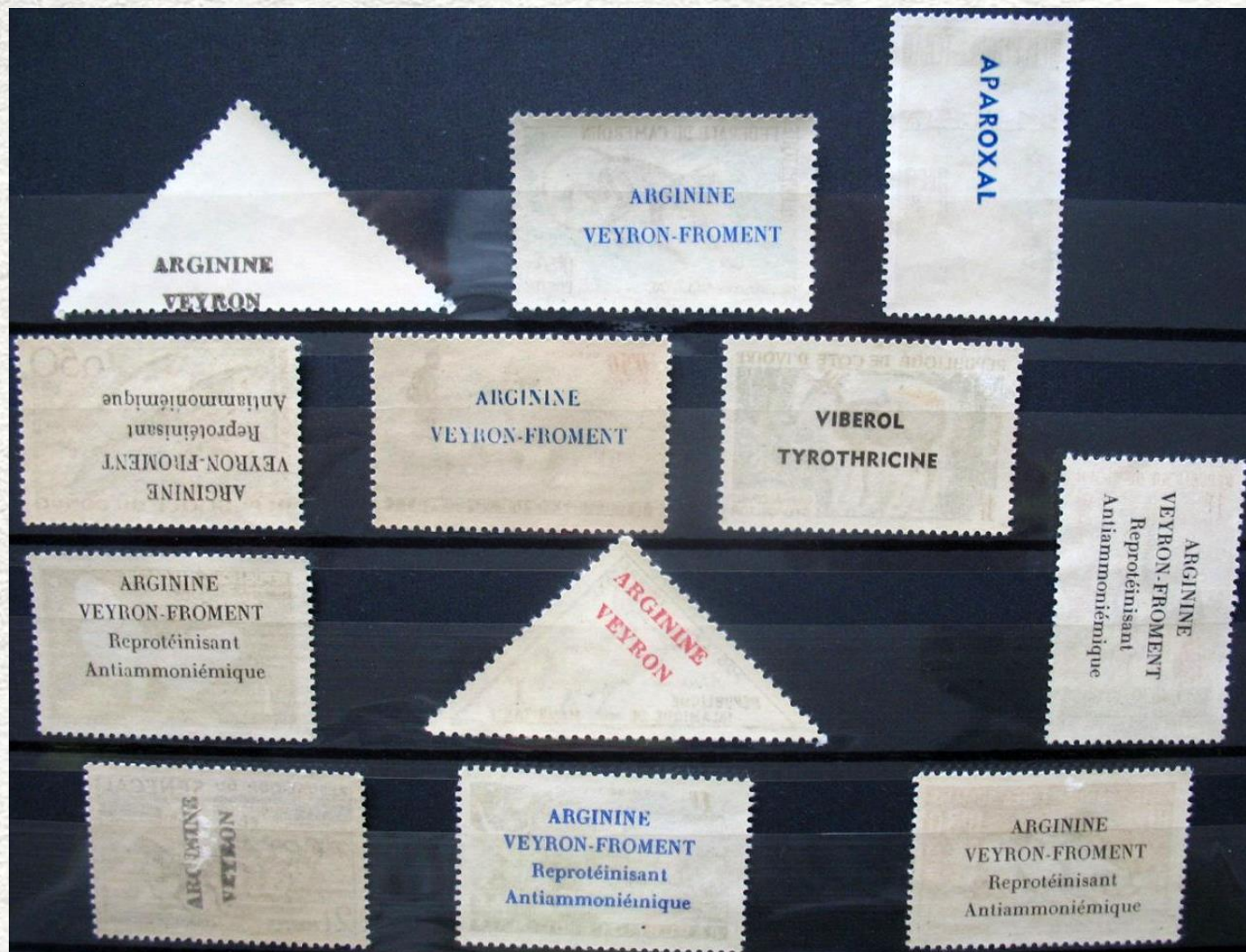
arthrodont-
dental
hygiene
toothpaste



Viberol
tyrothricine-
skin drying
agent



A large lot of Veyron-Froment underprints.



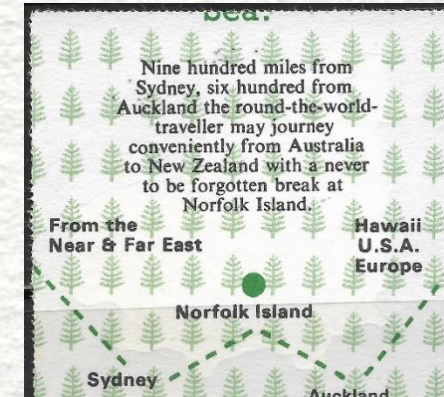
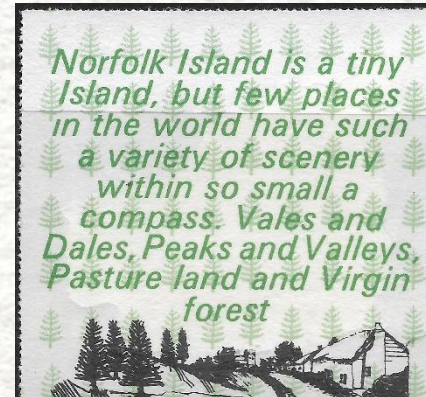
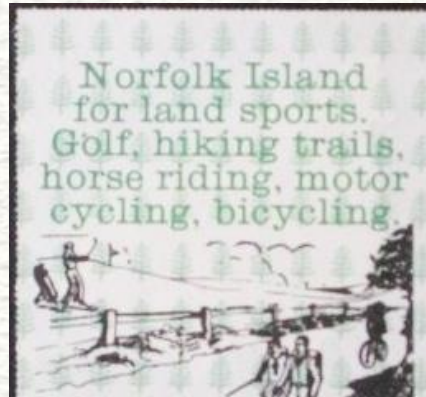
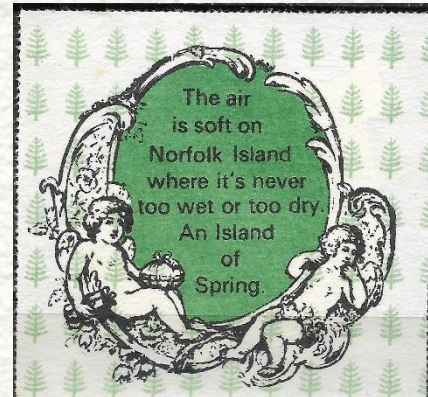
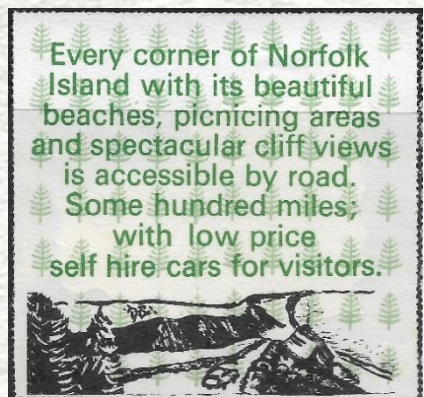
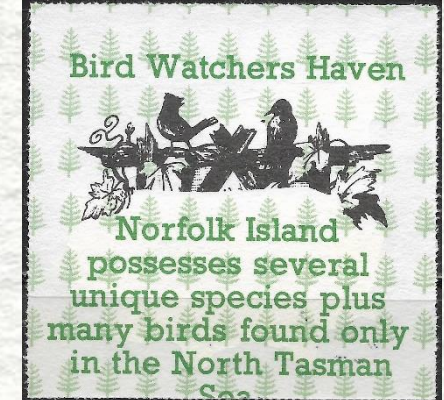
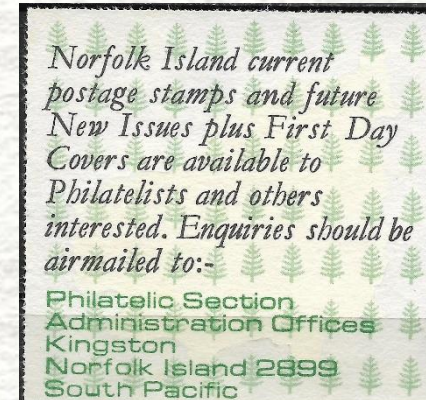
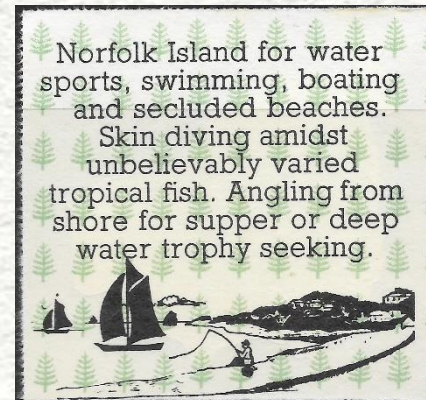
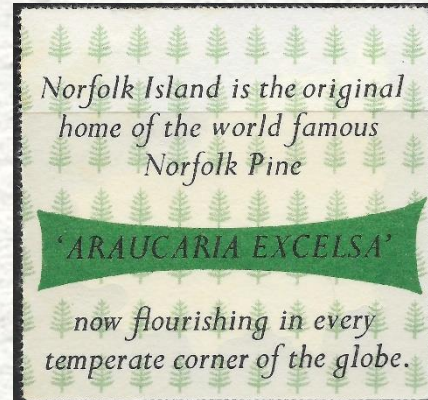
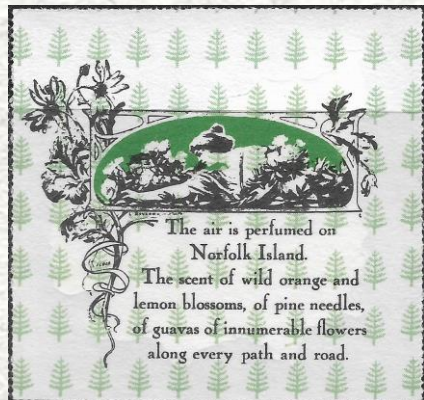
Tourism was the theme of this 1971 issue from Mauritius in the Indian Ocean extolling its natural wonders on the depicted scenes as well as related text on each reverse, a veiled advertisement.



MAURITIUS OFFERS A
WIDE RANGE AND
VARIETY OF BEACHES
ALL ROUND THE COAST
FOR BATHING AND
WATER SPORTS

MAURITIUS HAS
BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPES
AND MOUNTAINS. THE
TROIS MAMELLES RANGE
IS ONE OF THESE
MOUNTAINS

Several sets from Norfolk Islands die cut shaped stamps of 1978 featured backings promoting the country.



Coinage

Paper coinage was issued on an emergency basis several times in the twentieth century due to dwindling or non-existent metal supply.

Although produced primarily as change, they were eventually tolerated for use as postage.

A coin shortage in Russia in 1915 necessitated three Romanov definitive stamp designs familiar with the public to be printed on thin perforated cardboard as a replacement.

The reverse translates to, “Having circulation on par with silver subsidy coins” and bears the Imperial arms insignia.



Lower denomination stamp coins were needed in 1916-17, “on par with copper coins.”



Ukraine declared its independence after the breakup of the Russian Empire. On April 18, 1918, the country issued cardboard stamps as currency.



common
reverse



Counters

Various countries have added counter numbers on the reverse of coil stamps at regular intervals to help clerks determine how many remain on the roll for accounting purposes. Numbers are printed on the reverse either before or after the gum, counting backwards from the highest number on the roll at various intervals depending on the post office's wishes, every 5, 10, etc.

Some examples.

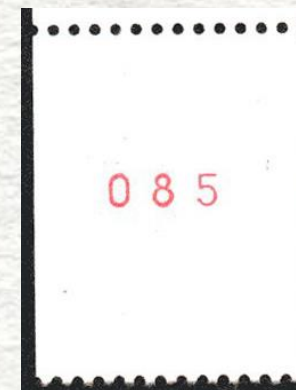
Germany
2006



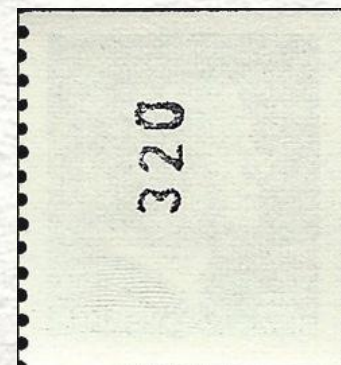
Germany
1959



France
1985



Sweden
1974



Switzerland
1970



Descriptors

Of all the things you can find on the reverse of a stamp, an explanation or further details of what is depicted is most likely what is written.

Portugal's 1895 "Ascension of St Anthony of Padua" set of 10 stamps is one of the earliest, all bearing a common Latin reverse, quoting St. Bonaventure.



Centenary of Saint Anthony
1195 * 1895

Oh blessed tongue, that ever
praised the Lord, and led others to
praise Him; now it is clear how
great are your merits before God.

St. Bonaventure

Hungary's 1925 set depicts sports, but it's not until you read the message on the back that mentions a 100% surtax is added in support of sporting groups. Valid from 4/27-12/31, printing of 133,738 sets.



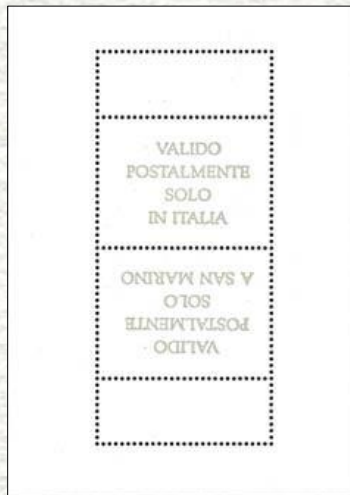
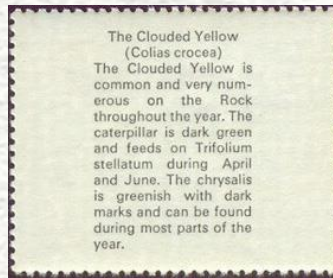
(issue includes the world's first Scouting stamp, 1000 krona value)



Montenegro's 1943 Italian occupation issue honors Peter Petrovich Nyegosh and his National Poem.



Numerous stamps and sets have additional details underneath them, way too many to show here, but would make a challenging area to collect.



Philatelic Marks

Post-production philatelic identification marks can be broken down in three categories based on who made it:

- Collector marks- the owner or former owner of a stamp
- Dealer marks- the seller of the stamp
- Expert mark- guarantor of a stamp's genuineness

Each owner of the world's rarest and most famous stamp, the British Guiana 1 cent magenta, left their mark on the back...



Previous owners and their initials

This is an ideal opportunity to point out who else has left their mark on this famous stamp:

- Stuart Weitzman. Outline of a stiletto shoes with 'SW' initials, pencil
- John Eleuthère du Pont. J.E.d.P initials, pencil
- Irwin Weinberg & Associates (who took it on a world tour). 'IW' initials, pencil
- Frederick T. Small. Comet, ink stamp
- Finbar Kenny. 'FK' (Macy's stamps who brokered the sale to F. Small), pencil
- Ann Hind. Seventeen point star (over the top of her husband's mark), ink stamp
- Arthur Hind. Four-leaf clover (under wife's), ink stamp
- Count Ferrary. Circled trefoil (two marks one faint), ink stamp

If you're wondering why Mrs Hind deliberately put her star over her husband's four leaf clover, it is because when Arthur Hind died he expressly wrote Mrs Hind out of the stamp collection and crucially the proceeds which would come from the sale of the One-Cent Magenta.

However, she contested the will, and eventually won the case. When she had the stamp back in her possession, and before selling, she made a point of attempting to rid the reverse of his mark.

Dealers have left their mark...



As have stamp expertizers...



Security

Stamp counterfeiting has been a problem since the first use of postage stamps. In some cases post office stock was stolen or ravaged by war, needing some addition to newer stock to differentiate stamps. Postal administrations have come up with several ways to imprint the reverse of their stamps as a security measure, known as control marks.

Security



Greece 1875 issue- denomination imprint



Sweden 1886 issue- post horn design



Fiume 1918 issue- name pattern



Queensland 1895 issue- moiré pattern



Brazil 1941 issue- three vertical green lines



Lebanon 1957 issue- line design

At the turn of the twentieth century Spain started to print long numbers on the back of its stamps. Why? Thievery from post offices, with stolen stamps being taken to other parts of the country. Government agents would frequent tobacco shops and alike to make sure only mint stamps with numbers allocated to their zone were being sold by the business.



Great Britain began a scheme in 1982 selling a portion of stamps at a discount. They were printed on the reverse with various designs in light blue for accounting purposes.



Stamp Production

The act of printing stamps has had both intentional and unintentional effects on what would eventually be found on the their reverse.

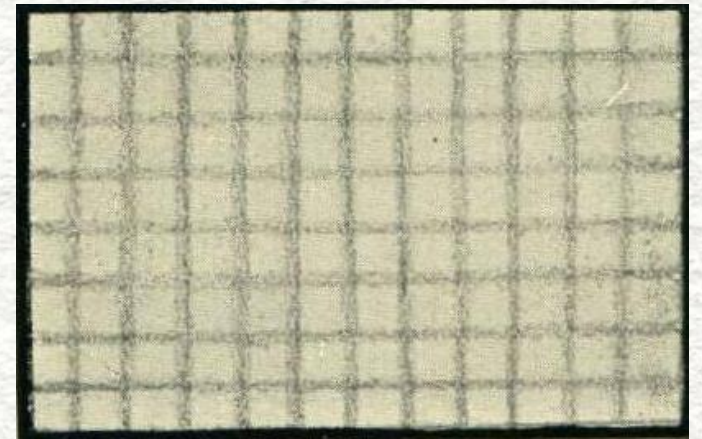
Let's start with the paper itself. More advanced collectors will note that certain issues were printed on different types of paper, some recognizable by what can be found on a stamp's reverse.



Bavaria 1875 issue- silk thread paper

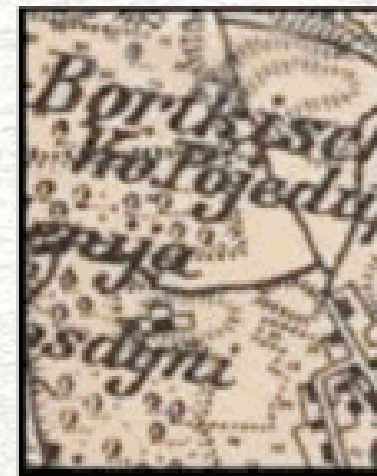
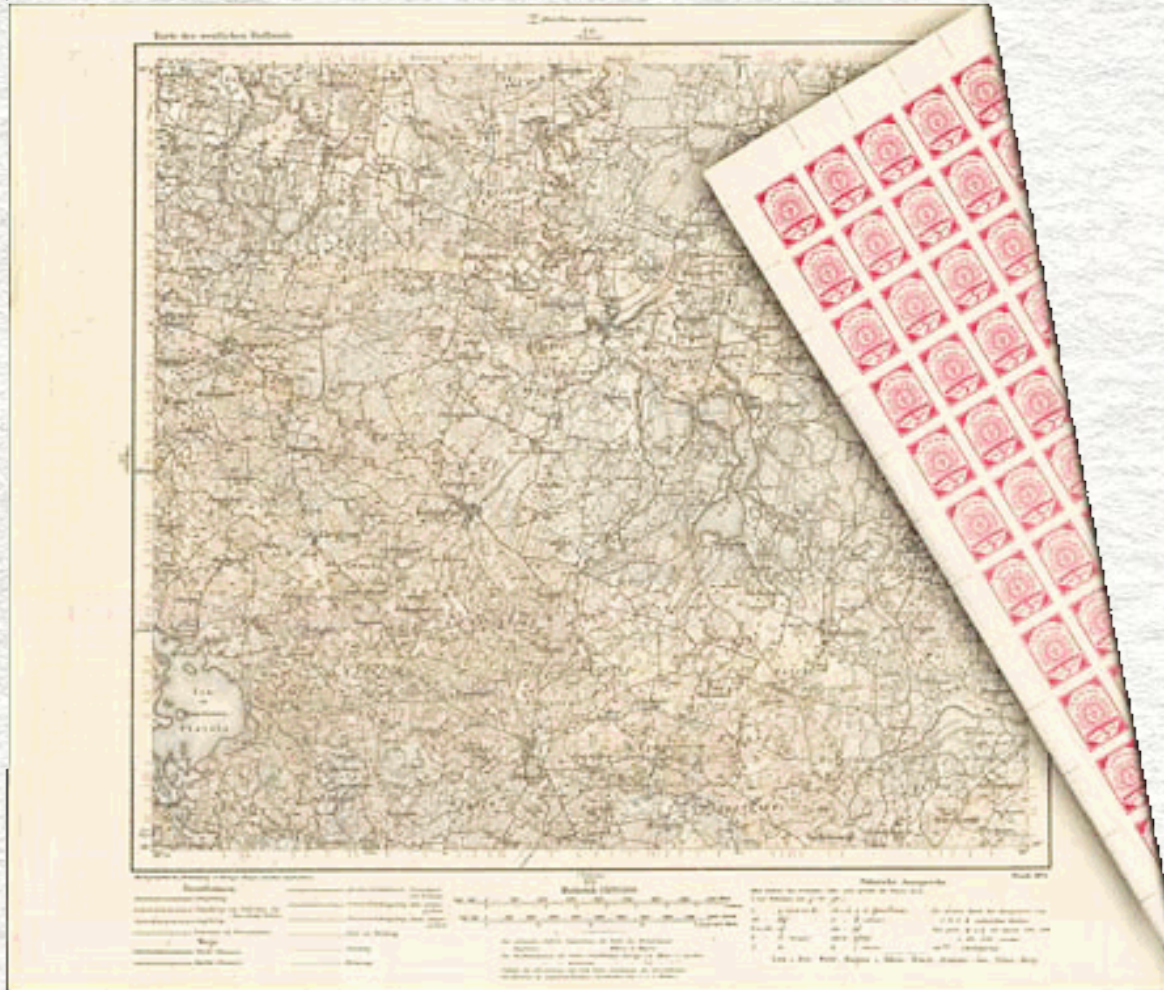


granite paper



quadrille paper

Paper was often in short supply during times of war. Latvia is best known for recycling unusual “papers.”



German military maps were used on the country's first stamps in 1918. At least 141 different map types of the region were used.

12 rows of 19 stamps/sheet

Later issues were printed on banknote paper stock.



partially reconstructed 10 rouble Bolshevik banknote



5 rouble 1919 Latvian Soviet government banknote



10 mark Bermond-Avalof army forces banknote



The act of printing can leave behind traces of ink in reverse on the back known as “set-off.”



Technology

Stamps implement advancing technology to assist in all aspects of postal activities.

Great Britain added graphite lines on the back of 1957 definitives to aid in letter orientation for machine canceling.



THE CONTENTS OF THIS ENVELOPE

plete sets (16 stamps) of the low value issue stamps produced for use with the experimental model of the British Automatic Letter Facer. The stamps bear lines of graphite

and phosphor to enable the machine first to detect the stamps and then to arrange the letters in stacks with the stamps in the same corner.

THE ARTISTS

$\frac{1}{2}$ d., 1d., $1\frac{1}{2}$ d., 2d. values—Miss Enid Marx
 $2\frac{1}{2}$ d., 3d., 4d., $4\frac{1}{2}$ d. values—Mr. M. C. Farrar Bell

TECHNICAL DETAILS

The 2d. stamp bears a line of phosphorescent material printed on the surface of the stamp, over the printed design, between the left hand edge of the design and the Queen's face, and a line of graphite on the back of the stamp under the gum. All the other values have two lines of phosphorescent material printed over the design and extending outwards to the perforations, and two lines of graphite on the backs of the stamps. The phosphor can be seen as dull patches by holding the stamps obliquely to the light. Originally experiments were conducted with stamps bearing only graphite lines, which the machine detected by high voltage devices. The graphite lines are no longer used and future stamp issues will bear only phosphor lines which can be detected by ultra-violet light. The experimental stamps in this packet were produced at an interim stage in the development of the automatic letter facing machine.

Size of printed surface of stamps: 0.71 inches by 0.86 inches

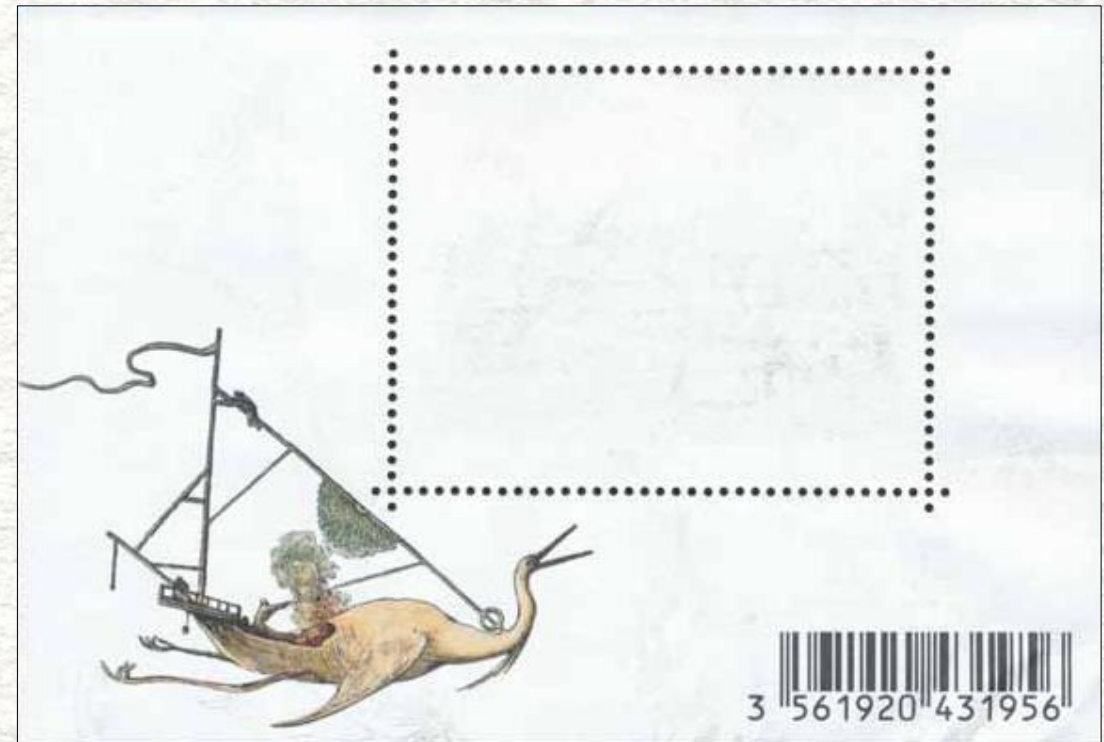
Watermark: Crown

Perforation: 15 x 14 (measured over two centimetres)

Stamps printed in England by the photogravure process by Messrs. Harrison & Sons Ltd.

The phosphor and graphite lines are printed separately by letterpress

This 2012 French souvenir sheet has a bar code on the reverse for use by postal clerks to use at check-out. It was moved to the face in 2014.



I hope you enjoyed this presentation on things that can be found on the reverse of postage stamps. There are certainly more out there!

Additional Online Resources

- <http://www.underprints.com/>
- <https://www.barrell.co.uk/pages/protective-overprint-and-underprints>
- <https://www.filatelia.fi/experts/index.html>