

# Philatelic Terms Explained

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## No.30 Newspaper Stamps

Seldom can there have been stamps considered so important to the nation's revenues that to forge them could, on conviction, incur the penalty of "death without the benefit of clergy". Such was the case with the imprinted newspaper tax stamps introduced in 1712 and compulsorily printed on sheets of paper *before* going to press to produce newspapers. The publishers naturally protested that the impost was "a tax on knowledge" – the cry that would go up if VAT is ever applied to newspapers, magazines or books – but it remained in force until 1855.



*Typical tax stamp (no name of publication)*

The tax was not entirely a fiscal matter. Its implementation enabled the government to take action against any publisher failing to have his stock of paper "stamped" before using it to print the newspaper. This hold over the publishers gave the authorities a better chance of controlling the many flourishing anti-government newsheets. Robson Lowe states that in 1760 there were 700 prosecutions for evasion of the newspaper tax with over 500 publishers being jailed for various terms, an effective way of suppressing political opposition.

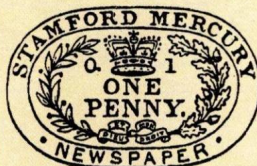
The one bright spot for the publishers was that all properly-taxed journals were allowed to pass through the post free of charge, as a courtesy rather than a right. These newspaper stamp tax postal "franks" were generally impressed alongside the title on the front page where it was easily visible. Although accepted as postage stamps, these impressed tax stamps are



*A "named" tax stamp of 1836 classified as fiscals by philatelists.*

Apart from the newspaper tax there was an advertisement tax. The Stamp Office was empowered to withhold stamped paper from any publisher who had not paid the advertisement tax in advance of publication. To prevent the passing of taxed paper from one publisher to another in an attempt to evade the advertisement tax, the name of the publication was added to the newspaper tax stamp from 1837 until 1855 when the tax was abolished.

In 1853, the Inland Revenue agreed to *The Times*, under supervision, printing the tax stamp during the print run, instead of having to submit the paper stocks for stamping at the Stamp Office in advance. It did mean, however, that the tax stamp was in black instead of the



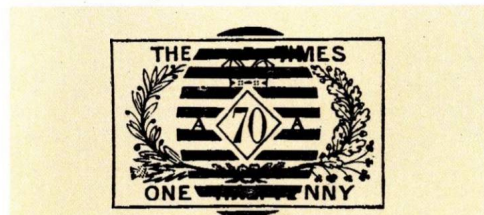
*Examples of the three impressed newspaper tax stamps in black, printed simultaneously with the printing run*

standard red. Similar facilities were granted to the *Stamford Mercury* (from 1859) and the *Illustrated London News* (from 1858).

Two years later, in 1855, the newspaper stamp tax was abolished, but *The Times* and the



A typical provincial newspaper "named" stamp *Stamford Mercury* continued to impress the stamp, which had become a postage stamp, on all copies sent to postal subscribers (about 40 per cent of the total circulation so far as *The Times* was concerned). As postage stamps, the printed device needed cancelling to accord with postal requirements and this was achieved by a printed cancellation, creating an early example of a pre-cancelled stamp.



The first "Times" postage stamp, issued in 1870 and pre-cancelled to prevent mis-use (Note "70" is not the year date but the *St Martin's-le-Grand* office number)



Pre-cancelled "Stamford Mercury" postage stamp (1870)

Finally, the introduction of a ½d postage rate for newspapers in 1870 brought about the general use of adhesive stamps by newspaper publishers. Exceptions were, once again, *The Times* and the *Stamford Mercury*, both of which continued to use a pre-cancelled frank of their own designing.



Enter this month's competition and stand a chance of winning a Royal Mail Post Card Album containing all the Royal Mail Stamp Cards (PHQ cards) and National Postal Museum cards on sale on 1 August. Answer the six questions below, the answers to which will be found in this month's *Bulletin*, and send with your name and address on a postcard to: August Bulletin Competition, National Postal Museum, King Edward Street, LONDON EC1A 1LP to arrive by 29 September.

The senders of the first two all-correct entries drawn will be sent the Post Card Album and cards. The senders of the next four correct entries drawn will receive the NPM cards. Answers and winners' names will be published in the November *Bulletin*.

1. What creature features on the 27p Microscopes stamp?
2. Who designed the Microscopes stamps?
3. The Scottish Aerogramme issued on 8 August commemorates which famous architect?
4. When did the "Mailsort" service become fully operational?
5. Which prominent politician recently visited Walsall Security Printers?
6. Who produced the marbled paper design for the Edward Lear miniature sheet?

The competition is not open to staff of Royal Mail Stamps & Philately, the National Postal Museum, their agents and their families. No correspondence will be entered into; the Editor's decision will be final.

The winners of the May competition were: G Bean of Gloucester (first prize), S Martin of Cornwall, C Beet of Humberside, C Reich of Australia, P Hockings of Denmark and M Wilkins of Norfolk.

The answers were: 1. Royal Scots, 2. Holmfirth, 3. Philip Sutton, 4. British Bechuanaland, 5. Cheddleton, Leek, Staffs, 6. Eric Gill.

Our thanks to all who entered.