

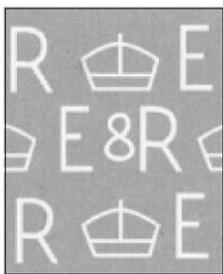
Secret marks!

Some stamps have secret marks that are often difficult to see. They are called watermarks and are used to try to stop people copying the stamp.

There can be two identical stamps but with different watermarks. The watermark can affect the value of the stamp.

Watermarks have appeared on British stamps from 1840 (when the first stamp was issued) to 1967. Some countries still produce stamps with watermarks.

Some British watermark designs:



King Edward VIII



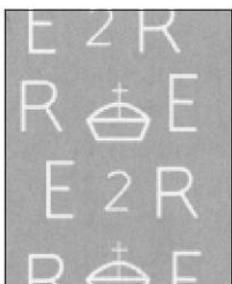
Imperial Crown



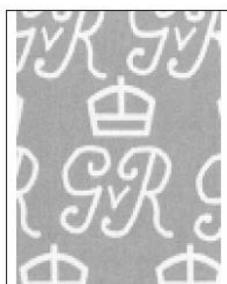
King George VI



Simple Cypher



Tudor Crown



Multiple Cypher



St. Edwards's Crown



Block Cypher



Multiple Crowns

Read on for:

- how stamp collectors find the watermark;
- more about watermarks;
- design and make your own watermark.

How stamp collectors find the watermark

Some watermarks on stamps are easily seen by just holding the stamp up to the light. Others are more difficult to find.

There are different ways to see the watermark. There are special watermark detectors that press the stamps under blocks of glass and shine a strong light through or there is a watermark fluid (a chemical substance) that is dropped onto the back of the stamp.

The penny red can either have the small crown watermark or the large crown watermark. These watermarks along with the number of perforations* and whether the stamps have letters only in the bottom corners or in all four corners, make a big difference to the value.



small crown watermark



large crown watermark



penny red



actual back of stamp

Does this penny red have the small or large crown watermark?

*See the booklet 'Tearing stamps apart' to find out about perforations.

More about watermarks

The watermark design was made by impressing a metal stamp onto the paper when it was being made. Where the watermark design appears, the paper is thinner than the rest of the stamp. The printing on the stamp hides the watermark and that's why some are difficult to see.

Here are two watermarks, one during the reign of King George V and one during King George VI. Spot the differences.



This stamp was issued in 1935 showing King George V. It has the block cypher watermark. There is V between the G and R. The G is for George and the R for Rex.*



This stamp was issued in 1946 showing King George VI. It has the King George VI watermark. Notice there is VI between the G and R and there is a difference in the font (*the type of letters*).

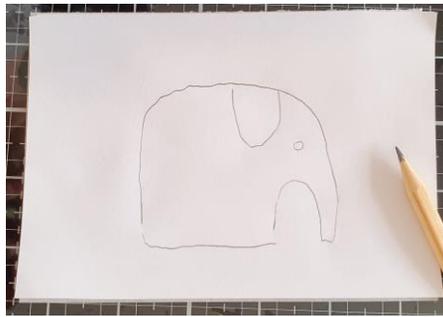
*Rex is Latin for King. The letters E and R appear on some Queen Elizabeth II stamps and for those stamps the R stands for Regina, the Latin name for Queen.

Design & make your own watermark

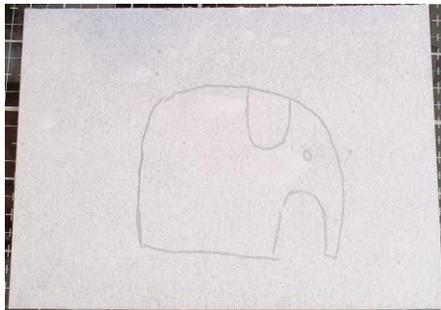
Keep the design simple as you have to draw it quite fast.

You will need two pieces of paper, a pencil and a bowl of water.

- Soak one piece of paper in a bowl of water.
- Carefully place the **wet** paper on a flat surface suitable to write on.
- Take the **dry** piece of paper and place it on top of the wet paper.



- Draw your watermark design. Don't take too long to draw the design as the top paper will start to get wet.
- Remove the top paper.



- You can see your design on the wet paper.
- Leave to completely dry and your design will have disappeared!
- Wet the paper again to see your watermark design reappear.