

WATERMARKS

A watermark is a deliberate thin spot created when security paper is made. The purpose is to create unique paper that is not available to the public, and that is difficult to copy. It is created by passing the wet paper pulp of a screened roll (a “Dandy Roll”) that has the watermark made from bits of metal. This metal piece creates a slightly thinner spot in the paper while squeezing the water from the pulp. This appears on a stamp as a darker area when the stamp is placed on a dark surface and wet with watermark fluid. Another means of seeing watermarks is to use a mechanical device known as a Signoscope ®.

Ireland has used two different watermark designs since 1922 - the “S inside an E” format (*Saorstat na h'Eireann*) was used from 1922 to 1940 and the “E” format from 1940 to the early 1970's. Since then, watermarks have not been used on postage stamps. Prior to 1922, watermarks of Great Britain were used on stamps sold and used in the British possession of Ireland. [All illustrations are as seen from the back of the stamp.]



**SE upright
normal**



**E upright
normal
format**

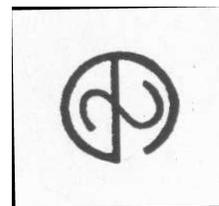
Watermarks may be found normal, reversed, inverted, and reversed and inverted depending how the paper was inserted into the press. Other configurations are possible, such as sideways left or right. The SE watermark is known in almost all positions. First, in the normal mode, it can be inverted, or to the left, or right.



**Inverted
normal**

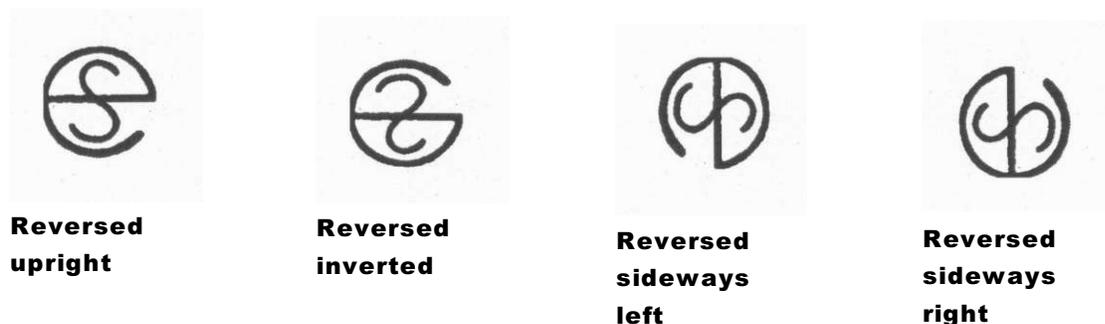


**Sideways
right**

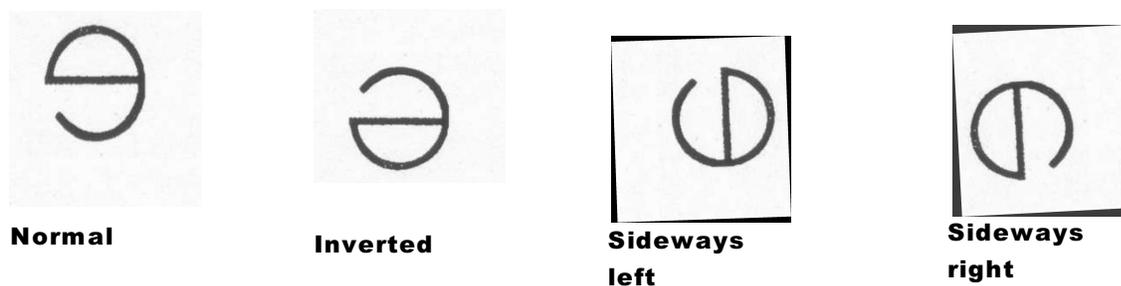


Sideways left

The SE watermark is also found reversed inverted format; however, it has not been reported in reverse normal, inverted, or to the left or right formats, although theoretically possible.



With more modern printing controls, the options on the “E” watermark are fewer. It is only known in the normal format, although inverted, and rotated to the left or right.



Watermarks are sometimes used on postal stationery, revenue stamps, and certain documentary paper. In some cases, stamps may have watermarks deliberately sideways (found mainly on booklet stamps). In the papermaking process, it is possible for a watermark to be partially or completely missing if there is damage to the “Dandy Roll”. In some cases, the paper may also have a manufacturer’s watermark along the outside border of the paper. This is normally trimmed off when the stamps are printed, although it is possible that a stamp could be printed in this area due to carelessness. Such errors are extremely rare.

Watermarks can be used to differentiate between stamps that may appear the same. For example, the Irish Sword of Light/Map of Ireland definitive series had the SE watermark until 1940. After 1940 until superseded in 1968, the E watermark was used. These are two stamps sets that used the same printed design but are different by virtue of watermark.

REFERENCES:

The Handbook of Philately, L. N. Williams, American Philatelic Society, 1990.

Scott Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue, Scott Publishing, Sidney, OH. Foreword and first pages on Great Britain and/or Ireland, as appropriate.

Stanley Gibbons Stamp Catalogue, Stanley Gibbons Ltd, London, England. Similar pages as in Scott’s.

Hibernian Handbook and Catalogue of the Postage Stamps of Ireland, Rodgau Philatelic Service GMBH, Rodgau, Germany. Section on watermark varieties.