

PRINT'S PAST

Hat-duty stamps

Hats, it seems, are back in fashion. But if you fancied a new titfer in the 18th century your purchase was subject to a hat tax: bad news for hat sellers, good news for printers.

Hats of all sorts had to carry a duty stamp, which were printed on paper, or sometimes linen, and affixed to the lining of the hat. Penalties were imposed not only on the hatter for failing to use the stamp and charge the duty, but also on the wearer of an untaxed hat.

Hat-duty stamps were printed from engraved plates in black or green on thin paper measuring 25x76mm. In design they usually carried a designation and value, a crown and the price range.

Also included was a number, which indicated the impression number of the printing plate. Paper proofs were held for reference at the Stamp Office as a check on counterfeits and forging tickets was punishable by death.

In 1798 a Mr John Collins was caught with a forged print plate, ready inked, with dampened linen ready to receive its impression. His hand bore the ink he had just wiped off the plate. He was sentenced to death.

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