

MEMORIES OF VISIT TO J. SLOPER CHECKPOINT LTD

James Norris

After the Blackburn Road factory closure in 1991, the remaining Sloper machines and dies were bought by a company called 'Checkpoint Security Systems Ltd' based in Reading, the company was then rebranded 'J. Sloper Checkpoint Ltd'.

In September 1992 myself, **Dave Hill**, and **Stephen Steere**, were lucky enough to visit their premises in Reading to see how the business was progressing under the new ownership.

It was strange to see the same old machines in a modern setting. Somehow, they looked out of place in such a modern office environment, rather than in a Victorian brick-built factory that had housed the perforating activities there for more than 100 years. Checkpoint had retained many of the old Sloper customers, but it was evident that new business had been slow. On reflection, it had the feeling that the business was already in a slow decline.



The open plan office at the Reading site – Dave Hill and Stephen Steere being shown the process from perforation through to despatch.

This article expands on the photos in Bulletin 363 (December 2009) Page 23 and featured on our web page, by Dave Hill.

The photographs below show the machines in their new home perforating sheets of first class and second-class definitive stamps.



Close up of single head die perforator pinning several sheets of stamps with a single stroke – note orientation of the sheet to the die head.

A feature of the single die configuration was that the Perfin could be placed anywhere on the sheet of stamps. The electric motor and foot treadle switch are under the work bench allowing both hands to operate the machine thus increase productivity. The wooden box at the rear of the machine houses a drive belt and pulley driven by the motor beneath.

The lady operating the single headed die machine is perforating 18p Stamp for the LB/S Perfin (London Borough of Sutton). The following five photos show the multi head die perforating complete rows of 10 definitive stamps with a single stroke.



Feeding in the stamp sheet



Using the treadle indexing mechanism to forward the sheet to the next stroke of the die head



1. Note the old Die Cabinet on the left
2. Close up of the multi-head die perforating a complete row of 10 stamps.
3. Completed perforated sheets index through to the delivery plate where the stamp sheets are laid face down.



The stamps are folded along the first line of perforation to prevent the sheets from slipping apart during the perforation process.

After the visit we reflected on the optimistic future of the security endorsement of postage stamps.

Dave Hill wrote to Sloper Checkpoint Ltd 15 years later to see how the current market for perfins was progressing.

The following is an extract from a letter dated April 2007 from Peter Rooke – Director of Sloper Checkpoint to Dave;

“I thought it would be helpful to bring you up to date on the business activities of Sloper Checkpoint. In the year 2000 Checkpoint was purchased by an American company who no longer wanted the more traditional parts of the business, including the stamp perforating. At

that time ‘Twofold Ltd’ was founded by Checkpoints’s original founders, Peter Rooke and Andy McCallum, and took over those parts of the business no longer wanted.

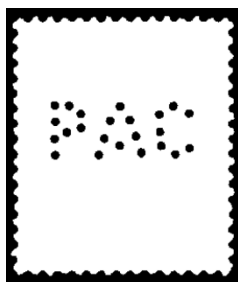
We continue to run the stamp perforating business, albeit on a rather reduced scale compared with Sloper’s when it was in its heyday. In the last year we have perforated some 1.5 million stamps. The customers are mainly local authorities, health authorities, and some commercial companies.

There was a time when we feared the business would be finished - when the Royal Mail introduced self-adhesive stamps - because it was not commercially feasible to re-design the dies and presses to cater for these stamps. However, the Royal Mail decided to continue to produce stamps in the original format which has enabled us to continue to provide the service.”

It seems that they lost the Prudential contract, which was by far their largest customer. Twofold wanted to increase the price they offered for the perforating service, but it is understood that the Prudential were unwilling to accept the new terms and ended the contract.

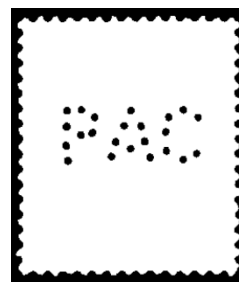
The Gault Catalogue shows two PAC dies both with latest reported dates in 1996 so that is likely the date of the loss of contract would have been around this time.

1938 - 1997



P0120.01M

1980 - 1996



P0120.06M

Presumably this meant the perforating side of the business was no longer viable, and was almost certainly the deciding factor to cease perforation activities with the few remaining customers they still had. Today, the company is known as ‘Twofold Document Solutions Ltd’, they have diversified into a range of mailroom equipment, multifunction printers, paper folders, Scanners, franking machines,

and envelope pressure sealing machines. The emphasis now is on robotic and digital processes bringing the company into the 21st century with the necessary technology to prosper in today's challenging environment.

In 2012 member **Derek Ransom** contacted Peter Rooke at Twofold and with some quick thinking and foresight was permitted to borrow the Sloper Ledger pages 1-36 which contained details of the dies that were transferred to the Reading site. Copies of these were added to our Society records by **Stephen Steere** to complete the missing pages in the original ledger that was at Sloper's Blackburn Road site prior to the closure.

So, we have Derek to thank for these valuable pages which otherwise would have been lost.

I recently tried to contact the new Directors at Twofold but they did not respond to my request for an up-to-date situation regarding the possible future of perforating stamps. Nor did they confirm the fate of the machines and dies, and so we must assume that sadly, as we already suspected, they no longer perforate postage stamps, bringing a close to the story of Perfin production in the UK.

However, they do still offer a perforating machine which can be seen on their website;



The TF I/T perforator has been designed for fixed text perforating, for example with terms such as ENTERED, PAID, VOID and SAMPLE. This perforator is designed to puncture multiple lines of text or symbols on a variety of documents including invoices, insurance claims, passports, cheques, delivery notes and shipping documents.

The premises of Twofold are on the corner of Milford Road and Cremyll Road, Reading. Their website has the following statement;

The History of Twofold Ltd

“Twofold Ltd was formed in August 2000, following a management buy-out of the Document Security and Forms Handling Division of Checkpoint Security Services Ltd, but Twofold Ltd’s heritage in managing documents dates all the way back to 1858 with the formation of J. Sloper and Co.



Twofold Ltd acquired J. Sloper and Co., which in 1868 had obtained permission from the General Post Office to perforate initials on postage stamps on behalf of his clients. Stamp collectors and collectors of discarded ‘perfins’ still get in touch to enquire about this connection to the historic machine.

Over the last 18 years we have become the leading independent supplier and maintainer of document management software and mailing equipment in the UK, enjoying steady growth and stability throughout that time”.



Acknowledgements

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------|---|
| 1. Bulletin 250 (Feb. 91) | Page 6 | Impression of My Visit To Sloper’s Works by Dave Hill |
| 2. Bulletin 254 (Oct. 1991) | Page 9 | Rosemary Smith’s article |
| 3. Bulletin 261 (Dec. 1992) | Page 6 | Dave Hill’s article |
| 4. Bulletin 363 (Dec. 2009) | Page 23 | Dave Hill’s article |