

ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER

By Mike J. Burrows

About ten years ago, whilst chatting to members of a local philatelic society after a meeting, the subject was turned around to perfins. During the course of the conversation someone said, that they had heard from someone else, that many years ago it was possible to buy perfinned postage stamps from an Ipswich post office.

At the time this was regarded as just a piece of gossip without any foundation whatsoever. But in the belief that all bits of perfin information should be recorded, even if somewhat dubious, a note was made of the conversation. Then promptly forgotten, at least until now.

To have an interest in more than one branch of philately can sometimes be an advantage. A recent piece of research that involved the identifying of subpostmasters of Ipswich in the late Victorian era, brought to light a possible clue to help substantiate the rumour first heard all those years ago.

As both the port and town of the Capital of Suffolk grew it became necessary to open more sub-post offices or branch receiving offices. In the early 1850's there was only one sub-post office. This was situated near the docks and had its own circular date stamp - WET DOCK/IPSWICH. A very popular postmark with local collectors. In addition to this Ipswich also boasted two branch receiving offices.

By the 1880's several more offices had been opened. One of which was at 46, St. Nicholas Street. This office was located in the premises of William Day, a grocer and provision dealer.

On page 12 of John Nelson's book "The Handbook of British Perfins" can be found an illustration of a Frank Braham Stamp Requisition Form. Attached to the form is a perfin D&F/G on the centre margin of either a ½d vermilion or a 1d lilac.

Also in existence is a small collection of a hundred or so of these so-called 'Braham Proofs', several of which have had a reference number added in ink. Some of these proofs are of perfins known to have been used on postage stamps by companies in the Suffolk area. Whilst some are not, as yet, recorded in the catalogue at all.

Reference was made in another article "Ipswich Firm's Philatelic Links" (published in the September/October 1980 issue of S.E.P.S. Bulletin) to the perfin,

341.1 SHC 10,12,8 4½mm.

Known with Ipswich postmarks of 1896-98, this perfin is number 2042 in the 'Braham. Proof' series. No. 2040 in the same series is,

143 RD/F/JB 11,11/13/7,13 4½/7½/4½mm.

and is identified as belonging to RD & JD Fraser of Ipswich and Felixstowe.

In the middle of those, two perfins is 'Braham Proof' No. 2041. Not listed in the catalogue, the configuration of this perfin is,

W.DAY

13,11,10,8

4½mm

The stop is not level between the W and D but is equidistant between the bottom two pins of each of the two letters.

The obvious conjecture to all this is that the subpostmaster William Day, acted as agent for Frank Braham and, therefore, the rumour was partially true. The possible correct explanation being that companies in Ipswich requiring perfined postage stamps could order them from William Day. The 'Braham Proof' No. 2041 being in the nature of a sample of the kind of work Braham could produce, rather than a required security perfin for William Day's grocery and provision business.

If the perfin SHC does prove to belong to S.H. Cowell this would add weight to the theory. Especially as both S.H. Cowell and RD & JB Fraser were located within a few hundred yards of William Day's sub-post office and grocery business.

Admittedly it is all theory, but can we be sure that we have heard the last from subpostmaster William Day?