

POST OFFICE ARCHIVE RECORDS RELATING TO PERFINS

In Bulletin 245 Pg.7-10, Michael Rucklidge extracted the story of "How Perfins Nearly Became Official" from old Post Office files discovered in the P.O. Archives by Stephen Steere.

DAVE HILL has been through the nine files and the following is a summary of the important information contained therein. He has done this to give members a taste of what is in the files; full transcripts of which can be borrowed from our library.

FILE ONE

The first files have been dealt with in Bulletin 245 April 1990 but to summarise:

T.L. Corbett, an M.P., asked the Postmaster General in the House of Commons on the 13th March 1906, whether his attention had been called to the case of a bankrupt postmaster named Braham who perforated stamps for various large city firms. Apparently he owed some £4000 for stamps received and not supplied. Was the PMG going to consider compensation to the firms defrauded?

The PMG replied that Mr. Braham was a sub-postmaster in Tabanacle Street, E.C., who in addition to his work for the Post Office, carried on a private business as a perforating press maker and perforator of postage stamps. The Post Office does not supply the public with perforated stamps or sell stamps at prices other than their face value or other than on cash terms. Mr. Braham's transactions in relation to the perforation being thus of a purely private character, there is no ground for compensating his creditors at the expense of the taxpayer.

However, the PMG did write a memo to his department asking whether it might not be possible for the P.O. to undertake the perforation of stamps. He said that similar cases had occurred before and there was no guarantee that they would not occur in the future. The public placed trust in a man believing he is acting officially as a postmaster.

FILE TWO

The Controller of Stamps replied that the Contractors (De la Rue at that time) would not do it. If the P.O. did it they would be

dearer than private enterprise as P.O. employees were better paid and worked shorter hours. Also philatelists would regard the stamps as official and place inflated values on perforated stamps which was exactly what they were trying to avoid.

It was asked what proportion of stamps were perforated and this was estimated at 2,000,000 per week on outgoing mail in E.C. District and about 300,000 on incoming mail. On the general question of the Department perforating stamps, although it was something they ought to do, it would interfere with the business of Mr. Sloper and others who have built up the trade by their own exertions: also Mr. Sloper, the inventor of the machine, may have legal rights.

FILE THREE

It was suggested that the Department should forbid any reference to the Post Office on the stationery of the perforators and that it should be clearly stated that the PMG is not liable for the delivery of perforated stamps. This would necessitate the perforators furnishing specimens of their stationery from time to time. There are examples in the file and the results were given in a very interesting summary which was expanded in a later file.

It was noted that the sub-postmaster in the N.W. District does a considerable business, this being Allchin's: his chemist shop is still trading.

King William Street was an altogether exceptional case. This was Sloper's and it was stated:- Mr. Sloper, the late Town Sub-Postmaster, whose son carries on the business, is the inventor of the stamp perforating machine and a very large business is transacted. The office only exists for the sale of stamps and the acceptance of parcels and registered letters and the Town Sub-Postmaster is paid a special salary of £300 per year.

The official wording of the insertion in the PO Guide was agreed and this went into the October edition. When Allchin's and Sloper's attention was drawn to this clause it resulted in some wordy and perhaps heated exchanges and these are in files four and five.

FILE FOUR

Mr. Simnett the Sub-Postmaster at Englands Lane (Allchin), when asked to add the clause to his stationery stated that he had just replaced it so it bore no reference to the P.O., so surely he didn't have to do it again? The P.O. suggested little stickers and Simnett complained of the cost; could it wait until his present stationery ran out? After asking how long this would take this was agreed upon if Allchin wrote to all their clients informing them in the meantime that the PMG was not responsible for the delivery of perforated stamps.

Mr. Siranett was still Sub-Postmaster when Sloper's bought out Allchin's in the late 1930's.

FILE FIVE

The new instruction in the P.O. Guide (i.e. that the name "Post Office" was not to appear on stationery and it was to bear a warning that the P.O. was not responsible for the supply of perforated stamps) was pointed out to Sloper's. This led to an exchange between the P.O. and Percy Sloper which was worthy of his late father.

It helps if readers are familiar with the Jennings history but in essence Joseph Sloper had been encouraged to open a Sub-Post Office many years before, basically to keep his poundage on stamps sold, giving him similar monetary advantage to his Sub-Postmaster competitors in the perforating business. His original premises were unsuitable, being too close to an established office, so he found additional premises. These were kept until the poundage was ended a few years after these events. The Post Office always was a nuisance to Sloper's even though they only transacted certain classes of business and received a special salary. Sloper's always thought they were treated shabbily by the Post Office and Joseph comes over as a tenacious, indomitable, even overbearing character.

With this file is an official record of irregularities at the Sub-Postoffice. There were no less than 337 between 1894 and 1906!

Whether this is a record I do not know and many may have been due to the fact that the office offered certain services.

The Post Office were never happy with the accommodation for the public and the separation of them from the perforating side of the business. The official record ends with this exchange:-

The Secretary asked whether the Sub-Postmaster had any intention of improving the accommodation. In reply Sloper asked what additional remuneration would be given. The Secretary asked what he would do for the existing money and Percy replied: nothing!

Percy had many interviews with the Post Office before he could be convinced that the regulations applied to himself and he had to comply. Sloper's claimed to be "official perforators to Govt. Dept's" and were reluctant to drop this valuable advert.

FILE SIX

This file is no less interesting. W.L. Kenny had taken over Braham's old office but had said verbally he would not be taking over his business. W.L. Kenny had previously been a Sub-Postmaster in Ipswich and had supplied perforated stamps. He now wished to perforate stamps himself instead of dealing through the medium of Sloper's, which was not actually carrying on Braham's business!

This led to further consideration as to whether Sub-Postmasters ought to be banned from doing this sort of work but as they said, there was nothing to prevent them from carrying it on in the name of a relative. Also this would be going back on the agreement with Sloper. It seems a more thorough survey of perforators was done and this resulted in a schedule which reveals perforators in Sheffield and Glasgow.

What follows is a summary of the more interesting information in this schedule.

The office at King William Street, (Sloper's) ordinary sales of stamps amounted to £26,000, yet the value of stamps which they perforated was over £500,000!

Englands Lane, Hampstead Office, (Allchin's) sold ordinary stamps to the value of £4,000 and perforated stamps worth just under £90,000. I'm not sure of the figures in the late 1930's when Sloper's took over Allchin's but in 1907 they did less than one fifth of Sloper's turnover, so they did not represent much competition.

The Sub-Postmaster at Bishop Road, in East London, who was also a stationer, perforated about £1,500 annually for "one City firm" but it does not state who. The office at Deptford Broadway did about £5,000 annually. The Sub-Postmaster at Islington High St., a grocer, as the former perforated a similar value mostly "for wholesale tea dealers in the City". (I wonder who these were?)

In the Provinces the Sub-Postmaster at St. Peters Street, Ipswich, perforated about £5,000 worth annually, and it was stated that he had previously been at St. Nicholas Street. (Was this still W.L. Kenny?)

Sub-Postmasters at Attercliffe Road and Handsworth and Wicker (all in Sheffield); Fallowfield in Manchester; Bull Street in Birmingham and Bewdley Street, Kidderminster perforated small amounts. There may have been a connection between some of these.

In Glasgow the Sub-postmaster at Cathedral Street did nearly £35,000 annually and offices at Bridge Street, Eglinton Toll, Kinning Park and Overnewton did small, amounts. Again I would have thought there was some connection between these.

Of the private firms, Waterlow's at Gloucester Street perforated perhaps £2,000 a week. The newly formed Printing and Stamp Perforating Co. at 9 South Street, E.C. did £40,000 a year. It is stated that Braham is connected with this firm. John Parry & Co., 187 Upper Thames Street, perforated £2,500 worth annually. W. Stanilas the Sub-Postmaster of Upper Thames Street has an interest in this firm. Albert Luff, 13 Paternoster Row, E.C. did a very small business.

It was decided not to ban Sub-Postmasters from perforating but they would have to pay in advance for stamps. It will be seen that this did not always happen.

In amongst these files is a small envelope containing an example of S4920.07 SM/&Co the perfin of Samuel Montague on a small piece of paper. Quite which perforator did this is not shown. Was this the one firm that the Sub-Postmaster at Bishops Road did work for?

To be continued.