

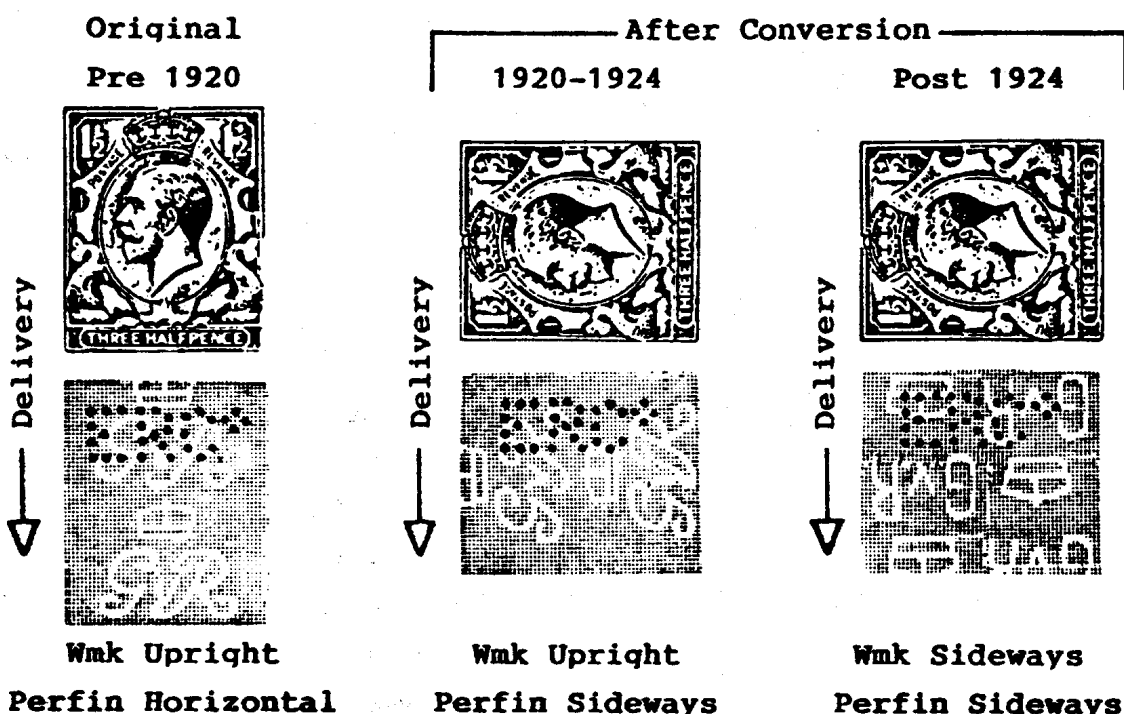
The first 'official' rolls of stamps to be produced by the Post Office appeared in August 1912, and were intended primarily for use in vending and affixing machines. Both the ½d and 1d values of the new Mackennal design were used for this inaugural issue. Rolls of 1000 stamps were produced for use in POKO affixing machines, but smaller rolls of 500 stamps were necessary for the rival FIXO and MULTIPOST affixers. Initially all coils delivered the stamps in a vertical format and were made by joining panes of stamps together at their selvedge, giving rise to coil joins every 10th stamp. The FIXO machine required 'Top End Delivery' coils, whereas the POKO and MULTIPOST machines employed 'Bottom End Delivery'.

The Multipost machine was a small, hand operated affixer manufactured by the Merkhams Trading Company in America to a British design, and was probably introduced into Britain c1912. For many years the company pressed the Post Office to produce rolls of stamps with a sideways delivery format in line with American practice. Eventually the Post Office acceded to their request and produced 'Left Side Delivery' coils for the first time in September 1920. These rolls were specifically for use with Multipost machines, and were again made up from sheets, but this time by joining them at the side selvedge producing an inevitable coil join every 12th stamp. No doubt in an attempt to minimise the financial impact to customers, the Merkhams company offered to convert, for a fee of £2, existing Multipost machines to take the new sideways delivery rolls.

With the change of contract in 1924 from Harrison & Sons to Waterlow & Sons came a change in watermark to Block Cypher and an improved method of producing coils by continuous printing. This removed the necessity to join sheets, and for sideways delivery coils, resulted in stamps with the now familiar sideways watermark.

What has all this to do with perfins?

Well, evidence from perfined stamps show that at least one company availed itself of the Merkhams conversion offer. The perfin ERC^o (E3850.01) used by the Edinburgh Rubber Company is fairly common and usually appears sideways on stamps with sideways watermark, the hallmark of the Multipost affixer. Recently however, Harry Skinner showed me a horizontal example of this perfin on a 1½d George V Typograph with upright Royal Cypher watermark. This must be a product of the affixer in its original condition using vertical delivery coils and prior to its modification to take sideways coils. The perforating head and pins were not affected by the conversion. The following illustrations outline the probable sequence of events.



Please help by checking your holdings of the ERC^o die, looking in particular for both the horizontal and sideways versions on Royal Cypher watermarked stamps. You may well have spotted other perfin dies on coil stamps (normally indicated by the presence of cut edges) that sport both horizontal and vertical versions. If so, please forward the details of issues and watermarks involved, together with any legible postmark information and so provide as complete a picture as possible of this tiny group of perfins.