

MORE OF JOSEPH SLOPER
"Asides" from the P.O. Archives

From Dave Hill

The history of perfins has been told in our Bulletin and publications. These are some "asides", peripheral to the main story, of which you may not have heard. They come from P.O. Archives, Post 30, 853 & 854, and are there for anyone to see.

Joseph Sloper spent much time in 1868, the year perfins on postage stamps were introduced, getting the new Money Order Office to accept his dating machines for use at all offices. He was not to know that perfins were to become so popular! Tower Royal Works, Hampstead, first appeared on Sloper's letter heading in 1879. Sloper was using black edged "mourning" notepaper in January 1878. Why?

The Provident Clerks General Guarantee Association Ltd., 61 Coleman St, EC provided a bond for Sloper when he became a sub postmaster in 1878. He sold them a perfin, PC/GG (P0990.01), in the 1890's. Look out for cancellations from Sloper's sub post office at 20 King William Street. (Braham used his Tabernacle St. counter stamp all the time on his correspondence with the P.O.) Make a page for your collection and include Allchin, New Englands Lane, Hampstead and Hancock, Wood St, all sub postmaster perforators. (I ought to get paid for these ideas!!)

It has been told how Sloper, after discussion with the P.O. about a suitable site, opened a sub post office to keep his "poundage" (discount) on stamps. In his first year his salary was £35 but poundage was £981. Poundage was introduced with the first stamped letter sheets and Mulreadies to placate stationers who claimed they lost business from the

sale of notepaper. In fact people had never written so many letters. The poundage enabled Sloper, Braham and Hancock to perfin stamps for no charge. The P.O. maintained they were subsidising the perfinning of stamps, rightly the concern of the firms who gained from the security they offered, i.e. the perforator's own clients. The sales of these stamps so perforated in fact reduced sales of stamps from main post offices, who received no poundage! The P.O. did not tolerate this for long and soon limited poundage to £400 and later stopped it altogether. Sloper fought hard and long for the "special consideration" he considered was his due. After all, he had taken on new premises to house the sub post office but the P.O. privately knew that little space was given to their business, most was taken up with perfin production. Sloper even wrote to his MP who in turn wrote to the Postmaster General - that Sloper was "a really good, upright, honest merchant".

Sloper did not even take his £35 P.O. salary for a while and the Inland Revenue asked the P.O. about it, as he had not paid income tax on it. Eventually the P.O. told him he must take his salary if he was to keep his appointment. He considered he had been badly dealt with and the argument continued even after his death. In 1906 his son Percy, when asked by the P.O. surveyor "How much extra space he would give to the public in the sub post office?" he retorted, "How much extra money will you give?" When told "None" he said no more accommodation would be provided.

In 1877 Sloper had been refused permission to perfin a trade mark. Periodically old ideas were raised, permission to emboss stamps to prevent theft was sought and denied:- by J R Mortimer, Seed Merchant of Driffield who had a press with name and trade mark which neatly fitted round the queen's head, sideways; by Sewell and Sewell, piano makers of

Finsbury Square who wanted to emboss "SS" in 1880; by Constantine and Floyd, jewellers of St Pauls Square and Caroline St, Birmingham in 1881 (they are thought to have used a Waterlow "SPG" type perfin); by F W Lloyd, London Wall in 1883; by C Hopewell & Sons, Basford, Nottingham over 4 stamps and Rennet & Co wanted to emboss a monogram in 1896.

Another frequent request was to draw an ink line through the stamps on a letter to discourage theft. In 1879 Major Wynyard said he had been in the habit of dating or initialling the stamps on his letters and complained that, short of time, he had just drawn a line through them, only to have it surcharged. MP Mr A W Dilke suggested it in 1880 and I Holden & Son, Architects of Manchester in 1881. Someone from Notting Hill thought that the new P.O.Savings Bank encouraged the theft of stamps and asked to be allowed to draw an ink line through their stamps.

In 1882 Thomas Cook & Sons wrote to the Daily News (below) extolling Braham and his service which must have annoyed Sloper.

Copy of Letter from Messrs. T.Cook & Son,
Tourists' Contractors, Ludgate Circus
extracted from "The Daily News"
Sep.2nd, 1882

PERFORATION OF POSTAGE STAMPS

(To the Editor of The Daily News) - Referring to a letter in your issue of today, we may say that we in common with many city firms, have all our stamps perforated with initials at the post-office in Tabernacle Square, free of charge. The postmaster is the inventor of a well-known system of perforating postage stamps, and the rule is for us to order a quantity of sheets of postage stamps, and they are delivered to us the following day on payment of their exact value, no expense being incurred for their

perforation or delivery, - He are, yours respectfully, Thos. Cook and Son, - London August 29th 1882.

In 1888 Robert, Church & Roberts, Manufacturers of London were instructed to stop stamping their stamps with a rubber stamp.

Braham had been refused permission to use an enlarged engraving of a perfined 1d lilac. The P.O. considered that their wording in the P.O. Guide meant that all imitation stamps in advertising was banned. The P.O. discovered that Braham was still using the enlarged stamp in 1896 but could not find the original correspondence. We can see it now, in the Archives, but with so many records it is not easy to find: it could have been on someone's desk! There was even talk of sacking Braham and eventually, in 1906, he went bankrupt.

In 1897 the right of sub postmaster perforators to include the Royal Coat of Arms on their letters and in their offices was questioned, as it seemed to lend them official status. Also Sloper's claim to be "contractor to HM Government" was queried. A letter to HM Office of Works elicited the information that they had ceased to use perfins about a year earlier (in fact the overprinted stamp came into use 24/3/96). HMSO said they had ceased in 1882 but this must have been on fiscal stamps, postage stamps were not perfined until 1922. A pity they did not ask the Board of Trade!

In 1890 a number of Chambers of Commerce pressed for a non negotiable stamp perforated with a cross because of the supposed cost of perfins. MP and postal reformer Henniker Heaton became involved. Walter Snell, 7 Pond Street, Hampstead suggested "NN" perfined stamps. R. Vickers & Son, Leeds joined the fray. The P.O. replied that Sloper only charged ¼% minimum £5 pa, Braham 1d per sheet minimum £1, Initialling

Perforating Co. 1/- per £5 whilst machines cost from 12/- upwards. The Cross or NN perfins did not allow perfins to be identified with the firm from whom they had been stolen. Even as late as 1993, J Sloper & Co said that they had been able to prove the ownership of stolen property when found. Without this proof there is no case against the thief.

In 1903 the question of the Guildhall School of Music using the perfin of the City of London arms was raised. At first it was stated that such perfins tended to make the sheet of stamps break up, then it was thought this was no more likely than with initials and anyway, this was not the concern of the P.O. The P.O. must have forgotten, or could not find the file that would have reminded them, that the original reason they had banned designs and full names had been because they were advertising.

The 1948 Paris Convention stated that perfins must be licensed but we (country) carried on without any permission being necessary at all.

Also in 1948 an ex-soldier, H Shorn, made an innocent enquiry about MEF stamps and the "Crown over SO" perfins of HMSO and any other "official" perfins. This prompted the P.O. to ban the "Crown over SO" perfins and "HM/SO" was substituted.

There are press cuttings of articles on perfins in 1956 from Linns Stamp News (USA) and Stamp Collecting (23/11/56). The latter piece by our first president, Charles Jennings.

Almost the last letter in the file is dated 13/5/53, asking about perfins, from a youthful Chris Carr, a founder member of the Society and present president. I do not think he expected to find that preserved for all time, but at least it did not lead to an enquiry as earlier letters had done!