

BOARD OF TRADE PERFIN FORGERIES

by John Nelson

Between December 1997 and June 2002 The Bulletin contained several of my articles in which I questioned the reliability of much of what had been written on the subject of Board of Trade perfin fakes or forgeries. In the very first paragraph of the first of those articles I expressed the view that most or perhaps all Board of Trade Perfins could be genuine. My scepticism was based on flaws which were evident in published articles, notably in the research of Captain H. T. Jackson, and also on the absence of anything other than suspicion and a widely held belief that forgery had taken place.

Brian Birch has recently donated to the Society's library and our librarian Alastair Walter has passed on to me, copies of some astonishing revelations which appeared in Mack's Stamp Review between April and August 1908. The Review was published on the 22nd of each month by Herbert Mack & Co of 20 Villiers Street, Strand, London WC and the following appeared in edition No.3 dated 22nd April 1908:

Grove Scandal

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*Well-known London Dealers, members
of the Stamp Trade Protection
Association fake British Stomps*

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Startling Developments Expected

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*We are now able to publish the result of our enquiries concerning the faking of English Stomps perforated Crown and B.T (Board of Trade). We accuse and are prepared to prove that certain members of the Stamp Trade Protection Association obtained a machine for faking these rare perforations, that they faked large quantities of all issues and that they sold them as genuine, both privately and **through several of the London Auctions**. We can prove by our evidence*

1. that the machine was made on a certain date by a leading firm of Government contractors

2. that it was copied from a genuine Crown and B.T Stamp, from which the colour had been bleached and the perforations cut off in order not to raise the suspicions of the firm who innocently made the machine

3. that the faking machine was delivered to the dealers in question

4. that the some dealers have sold large quantities through several of the London Auctions.

5. that they have also sold stamps privately to several of their customers

*The most unfortunate part of the whole disagreeable business is that faking has been so well done that the stamps have in nearly every case been passed as genuine by the **leading London experts**. It is impossible for us to say how many hundreds of pounds collectors may have been swindled out of, but we can say that **nine** out of every ten stamps which have appeared in the London Auctions during the last twelve months are forgeries.*

On 10th April 1908, Herbert Mack & Co had written a letter to Mr J. S. G. Telfer, the Secretary of the Stamp Trade Protection Association saying that they were now in a position to place at the disposal of the Association such information as would lead to the conviction of two dealers, who were members of the Association, for faking British stamps. The Association was asked to institute criminal proceedings against the accused members and if this were done Mack & Co would contribute £25 towards their costs.

Within three days of the sending of this letter Mack & Co found that the information it contained had leaked out and that the matter was being discussed by a large section of the stamp trade. It was in these circumstances that details of their accusations were published in the 22nd April issue of the Review. Telfer's reply to the letter, received by Mack & Co on 16th April, said that the information provided was not sufficient to enable the Association to take any action. in the matter and suggested a

meeting at which the Directors of the Association would be given, in confidence, definite particulars of the accusations.

This meeting took place on 23rd April, Mack & Co being represented by Mr Lowden, described by them as the man 'whose efforts in detecting forgeries in the interests of Philately have been of great service to us, and to whom we are indebted for most of the information concerning the fakes in question.' The Directors present were Mr Hadlow, Mr J. H. Telfer (Plumridge & Co) and the Secretary, Mr J. S. G. Telfer. According to Mack & Co, Mr Lowden was received in a hostile manner and had to threaten to withdraw before he obtained the fair hearing to which he was entitled.

Lowden began by complaining about the breach of faith whereby the contents of the letter of 10th April had been publicised, and confronted the Director thought to be to blame. The un-named Director's response was that he was not the culprit but that the information had probably been divulged to others through the carelessness or ignorance of a member of his firm. Satisfied with this, Lowden disclosed his information and named the two well-known dealers who were accused.

The next Mack & Co were to hear was in a letter from Solicitor Mr S. A. Jones of Ludgate Hill, who had been instructed by the Association to obtain, and consider from a legal point of view, all the available evidence. Before providing this, and in the light of the previous breach of faith, Mack & Co, asked for a written guarantee that proceedings would be instituted if the evidence produced was deemed, by an independently appointed Counsel, to be sufficient. No such undertaking was forthcoming.

The matter rumbled on until the August edition of the Review with recrimination on both sides. Apparently the dealers were at first saying that they obtained the forged stamps from one another. Then the Association asserted that one of the accused was not a member (although his firm was) and the other, on being questioned, had assured them that he was not involved. In their official journal *The Stamp Collector's Fortnightly* the Association dismissed the accusations of Mack & Co and

suggested that the motive for the attack was 'a desire for self advertisement and cheap notoriety'.

Whatever they may have said, they never disputed that the stamps were fakes nor that they were sold by both the accused dealers, maintaining only that none of their members was responsible for making the fakes. They did not at any time state that the two specific charges made by Mack & Co were false or publish the result of their internal enquiry.

There the matter seems to have come to an end but some good did come out of Mack & Co's exposure. They reported that several collectors who had bought Board of Trade forgeries had had their money returned and that at least one firm of Auctioneers who sold a number of the stamps had written to the purchasers asking for them to be returned and promising to refund their money. Satisfactory so far as it went, but they observed that there must have been numbers of collectors who had bought the stamps but were not yet aware that they were faked.

On the basis of all that appeared in Mack's Stamp Review and the nature of the response to the allegations by the Stamp Trade Protection Society it is impossible for me to continue to suggest that **perhaps all** Board of Trade perfins could be genuine. The machine acquired by the dealers would have raised suspicion if they had asked for it to contain multiple dies so I think we are looking here for only one forged die. Interested members might like to suggest which one it is of the thirty dies I illustrated in Bulletins 294 and 300.

Who the crooked well-known London stamp dealers were I have no idea but they seem to have got away with it. Mack's Stamp Review, on the other hand, does not appear to have flourished. I have noted for sale on the Internet a bound volume containing Editions 1-14, Feb 1908 to May 1909 which may have been the complete run. Could that have been the price they had to pay for ruffling the feathers of the stamp dealing establishment of the time?