

ONE MAN'S RUBBISH IS ANOTHER MAN'S TREASURE

Maurice Harp

When I looked at the list for Auction No.5 late last year lot 183 was described as “Perfin J.G/&Co on pages – 34 different plate numbers – 70 stamps – all seconds – ideal for 1d red fanatic”. Well as a fan of line engraved perfins I had to put a bid in although I wasn't sure I quite qualified as a fanatic. At the Societies AGM John Donner warned me that the quality was really pretty bad with all the stamps trimmed – but the bid was in and I let in stand. Well I guess I was a bigger fanatic than others in the Society and I had the winning bid. The lot duly arrived and I had to smile when I opened it as the vendor had written on the front “ideal for 1d fanatic”. Well the lot turned out to be a lot better than I expected. I had expected all of the stamps to be J3085.01 that is the common die but I was pleased to find that there was one copy of J3090.05 that is a relatively scarce die. The rest were all die J3085.01. The die is believed to have been used by James Gibbs who was an acid manufacturer. The company operated in Bristol, Cwmbran, Plymouth and London. An advert from the 1870's is shown together with extracts from directories of the period. The entry from the London directory is particularly interesting as it refers to J.G & Co.'s compound feeding cake.

<p>JAMES GIBBS, MANUFACTURER OF OIL OF VITRIOL. BROWN ACID, & MURIATIC ACID, VITRIOL WORKS AVON STREET, ST. PHILIP'S, BRISTOL.</p> <hr/> <p>Vitriol Works, Cwmbran. MONMOUTHSHIRE.</p> <hr/> <p>SULPHURIC ACID WORKS CATTE DOWN, PLYMOUTH.</p> <hr/> <p>JAMES GIBBS AND CO. VITRIOL & MANURE WORKS VICTORIA DOCKS, LONDON.</p>

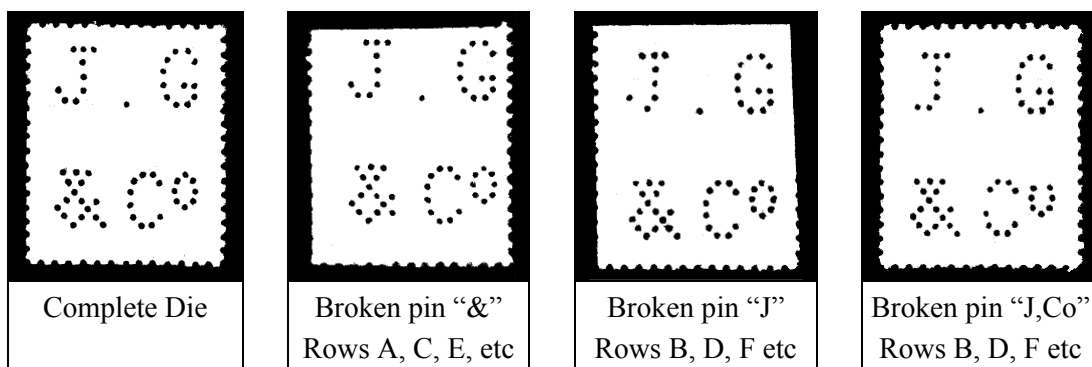
James Gibbs & Co. - vitriol, chemical & artificial manure manufacturers; sole manufacturers of Gibbs' patent ammonia-fixed guano, manufacturers of J.G.& Co.'s compound feeding cake. Thirteen International prize medals awarded. Offices 16 Mark Lane, EC; King Street, Bristol; 42 George Street, Plymouth; Works, Victoria Docks & Burdett Wharf, London; & Cattedown, Plymouth. *Kelly's London Directory 1877*

James Gibbs & Co. – manufacturers of oil of vitriol, brown acid & muriatic acid, Avon St, St Philips; Cwmbran, Mon.; Cattle Down Plymouth; and Victoria Docks London. *Morris & Co Directory & Gazetteer Somersetshire & Bristol 1872*

So I first looked at the cancellations and as expected found London EC, Bristol and Plymouth. Unfortunately no copies used in Cwmbran. I also found a number of dated copies, the earliest with May 1872 which predated the dates in the Illustrated catalogue by over four years and confirms that the die is a Sloper die.

So then I turned to the plate numbers. As the lot was described there were 34 different plate numbers. Our new catalogue lists fifty-three plates for J3085.01 so I didn't expect to uncover many new plates but I was wrong as the lot included plates 117, 131, 136, 140, 141, 144, 145, 146, 147, 152, 153, 165, 175, 217 – all of which were previously unrecorded. So now there are sixty-seven plates recorded for this die!

The main reason that I had gone after the lot in the first place was to try and determine the die configuration for the die. With the amount of material from the lot this turned out to be a relatively easy task. I found a number of broken pin varieties that are shown below.



I won't bore you with the details but by studying the letter positions it was a relatively easy task to establish that the die was a simple 1 x 2 and also that the one machine was used to provide stamps to Bristol, Plymouth and London.

So this unloved lot yielded a great deal of information. It confirmed that Sloper made the machine, that it was a simple two-headed configuration and added another fourteen plates to the catalogue. On a personal level it gave me another twenty stamps for my collection and hours of entertainment. So now all I need to do is put the rest back into the auction – who knows I might even make a profit.