

RYLANDS & SONS – COTTON SPINNERS

Dave Hill

The firm of Rylands & Sons was founded in 1819 by Joseph Rylands of St Helens Lancashire, with his three sons, Joseph, Richard and John. John Rylands assumed control of the company in the 1840s and developed it into one of the largest textile manufacturing and trading companies in Britain. The company continued to expand until the early 1920s when in common with most of the Lancashire cotton industry, it began to decline and finally ceased trading in 1971.



John Rylands was one of the outstanding figures of his time. When he died in 1888, he was the undoubted king of the Manchester cotton industry, due both to the economic climate and his own genius. His estate was the largest left by any cotton manufacturer, and the first in

Manchester to exceed a million pounds (£2,574,922). His fortune stood as testimony to his success, and the firm he created was to last for 100 years after his death.

Born in Parr, near St Helens, in 1801, to Joseph Rylands and his wife Elizabeth Pilkington, John was the youngest of the three Rylands sons, Joseph was a manufacturer in his own right, but in 1819 he joined forces with his sons (Joseph, Richard and John), who had their own thriving business, and the resultant firm was known as Rylands

RYLANDS & SONS LIMITED,
COTTON SPINNERS,
MANUFACTURERS, BLEACHERS, & DYERS
or
Domestics, Printers, Shirtings, Long Cloths, T Cloths, etc.,
At Gorton Mills, near Manchester;
Gidlow Works, Wigan;
Mather Street Mills, Bolton;
Heapey and Horwich Vale Bleach Works;
Swinton Mills, Swinton;
Floor Cloth Works, Chorley.

WADDING & COTTON WOOL MANUFACTURERS
(GREY, BLEACHED AND DYED),
AT IRWELL & MEDLOCK WORKS, WATER STREET, MANCHESTER.

READY MADE CLOTHING.
Bedding and Mattresses, Ladies' and Children's Underclothing,
SHIRTS, MANTLES, CLOTH CAPS & STAYS,
At Medlock Works, South Junction Street; Longford Works, Crewe; & Longford Buildings, Oxford Street, Manchester.

COTTON THREAD MANUFACTURERS, BLEACHERS AND DYERS,
The Dacca Twist Company, Portland St., Manchester.

GENERAL SALE ROOMS,
New High St., Bread St., & Market St., MANCHESTER;
Wood Street & London Wall, LONDON;
Leigh Street, LIVERPOOL; & Rue d'Uzes, PARIS.

LIST OF DEPARTMENTS.

Bandanæs Beddings Blankets Bleached and Dyed Calicoes Boots and Shoes Carpets Checks and Gingham Cotton Handkerchiefs Cotton and Linen Diapers Cotton Sheets Craws Cusled Hair	Damasks Dowels, &c. Flannels Flowers, Foreign and English French Merinoes Fustians Gloves Grey Calicoes Grey Linens Haberdashery, Stays, and Fancy Hosiery Hats and Caps Hosiery Woolen Cloths	Irish Linens Iron Bedsteads Lace Ladies' and Children's Underclothing Millinery Muslins Oil Cloths Plain and Fancy Dress Prints Perfumery and Fancy Goods Ready made Clothes Worsted and Yarns	Ribbons, Coventry and Foreign Rubber Goods Shawls, Mantles, &c. Shirts Silks Smallwares and Umbrellas Staves and Fans Stuffs Table Covers Ticks Waddings and Cotton Wool
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and Sons. This small business undertook the hand-weaving of coarse and coloured linen and calico goods for the Chester trade: John's role was as a commercial traveller and marketer of those goods.

He proved so successful in this that in 1823, he was able to cease travelling and, on behalf of Rylands and Sons, open a warehouse in New High Street, Manchester. This proved, despite the move away from the traditional haunts of Wigan manufacturers (who produced solely for Chester), to be excellent timing, as Manchester's commerce was growing faster than its industry, due to post war trends.

Rylands and Sons went from strength to strength, entering into other aspects of the cotton business, such as the finishing and spinning of yarn. The 1830s saw the firm's emphasis shifting towards cotton rather than linen, and they began to buy and lease mills, and sell goods other than their own by becoming merchants for the Scots and Irish markets. The Wigan estates, purchased in 1825 for the erection of the Wigan Linen Works, also proved to have valuable coal seams, and from 1839 onwards, the Rylands family became colliery masters.

In 1836, Joseph, the eldest son, retired from the firm and established the Hull Flax and Cotton Mill Company. Six years later Joseph Senior agreed to dissolve the partnership, leaving John Rylands in control of the business. The original name remained, but John, always the most talented member of the family, was now in sole control.

He further expanded the firm in the following thirty years, acquiring more mills, opening more departments in the Manchester warehouse, setting up offices and warehouses in London, Liverpool, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, and Glasgow, and employing various partners and managers, such as John Cross, William Carnelley and Reuben Spencer.

In 1873, John Rylands attempted to provide for the future of the business, following the demise of his son and heir, William. On the 25th October, Rylands and Sons Ltd were incorporated as a joint stock company, with a nominal capital of £2,000,000 in £20 shares, 9 directors and a governor. John Rylands continued to preside over his company as if nothing had changed, and the board only met rarely.

Until his death in 1888, and a period afterwards, the firm continued to expand and make profits. However, the market had been unstable for some time, due to changes in the textile trade and the growth of the ready-made clothes industry, and Rylands and Sons Ltd now lacked the strong leadership required to transform either the marketing strategy or the structure of the business. There were attempts throughout the last 20 years of the century to withdraw from unprofitable ancillaries, such as coal mining and the social aspects (schools, shops) of the factories, and expand the export trade, but the firm grew steadily less and less profitable.

THE

DAGGA TWIST COMPANY,

Cotton Spinners,

MANUFACTURERS, BLEACHERS, DYERS, AND FINISHERS.

CALICOES, MUSLINS, DIMITIES, TICKS, REGATTAS, DAMASKS, TWILLS
SHEETINGS, WINDOW HOLLANDS, &c.

SEWING & CROCHET COTTONS.

BRAIDS, SMALLWARES, AND WADDINGS.
WATERPROOF GARMENTS, UMBRELLAS, &c.

HEAD OFFICE—PORTLAND STREET, MANCHESTER.

BRANCHES:—

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LONDON—55, WOOD STREET.
GLASGOW—22, SOUTH FREDERICK STREET, GEORGE'S SQUARE.
LIVERPOOL—COMPTON HOUSE, LEIGH STREET.
BELFAST—15, COLLEGE STREET.

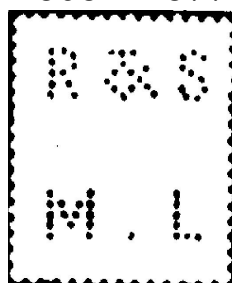
RYLANDS & SONS Limited, Proprietors.

This decline was not immediately apparent, and until the 1920s, under the guidance of three men, Reuben Spencer, James Horrocks and William Carnelley, who held the chairmanship in rotation, the standard of prosperity was maintained. It was in 1921 that the unwillingness to develop and change the firm's outlook led to substantial losses in stock value due to the collapse of the post-war boom, and dividends began to wane. Despite economies, nil dividends were declared in 1932 and 1939. The centre of the textile and fashion trade was now London, and likely to remain so. Various outsiders were appointed to the board in a vain attempt to rejuvenate the failing company, but, despite a brief post-war boom in the 1940s, Rylands and Sons suffered the same fate as much of the British cotton industry, recording its first absolute loss in 1953. In the same year,

the firm was taken over by Great Universal Stores Ltd, established in Manchester in 1900, and in 1971 active trading ceased. The name of Rylands and Sons was removed from the Register of Companies in May 1989.

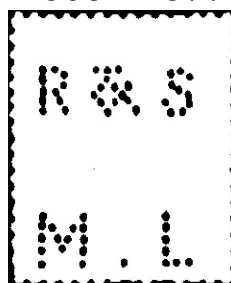
London, Manchester & Regional Offices

1868 – 1877



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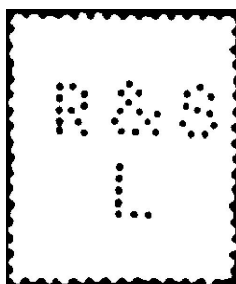
1868 - 1877



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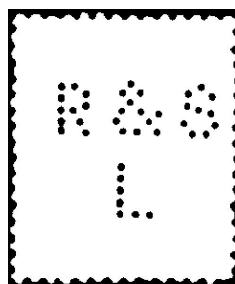
London Office

1875 - 1895



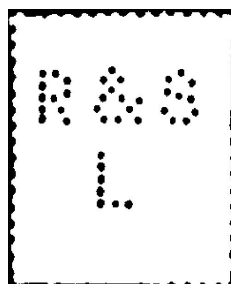
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1875 - 1895



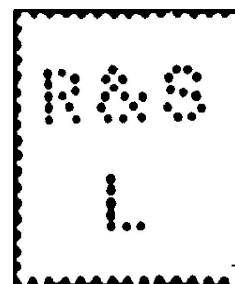
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1878 - 1900



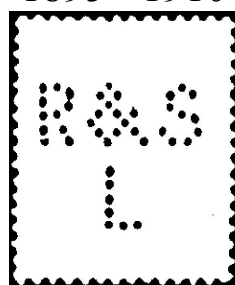
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1895 - 1939



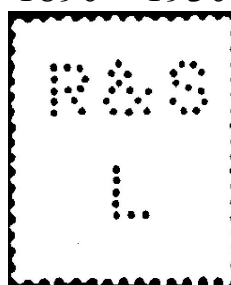
R4820.02 (c)

1895 - 1910



R4820.05 (p)

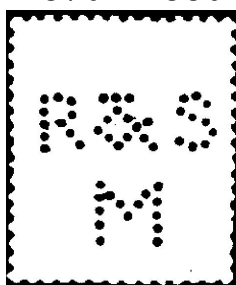
1890 – 1930



R4820.03 (c)

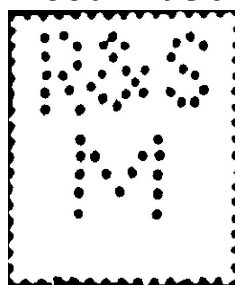
Manchester Office

1870 - 1880



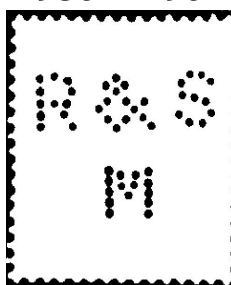
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1880 - 1936



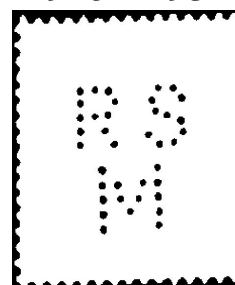
R4870.03M (c)

1935 – 1952



R4870.01(p)

1925 - 1934



R4860.02 (c)

Rylands and Sons used various perfins with R&S/M for their Manchester office between 1870 and 1952 and with R&S/L for their London office between 1870 and 1939. Perfins R&S/M.L were also used for these offices between 1868 and 1877. This last perfin is the only one reported used by their **other** branches as well. These were at St Helens, Wigan, Liverpool, Chorley, Crewe, Swindon, Bolton and Glasgow. The provisionally identified dies (p) and confirmed dies (c) are illustrated above. There are also a number of other dies that could have been used by Rylands but the jury is still out on these.