

## A SIGNIFICANT DISCOVERY OF PERFIN RELATED RECORDS.

The following article is based on Post Office files located by Stephen Steere. The Society acknowledges the Post Office copyright to this material and thanks the Post Office Archives at Freeling House, 23 Glasshill Street, London SE1 for giving permission to print the information in our Bulletin.

The files tell a fascinating story of how perfins might have become official. Stephen is a very new member and is to be highly commended for this discovery.

The full story is worth reading and it is proposed to publish it in a form to be decided. Logically it would fit into Jennings' book. Your comments would be welcome.

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### HOW PERFINS NEARLY BECAME OFFICIAL.

In 1906 occurred "the Bankruptcy of a Town Sub Postmaster\* who carried on a Stamp Perforation business, and the loss of large sums of money entrusted to him by Customers for Stamps." This obviously created concern that such losses could be associated with the Post Office rather than the Sub Postmaster acting in a private capacity.

\*(This Sub Postmaster was Frank Braham of Tabernacle Street E C. He had had brushes with the Post Office previously, notably in 1886 when he was severely censured for using on his sales literature the royal coat of arms, pictures of current postage stamps and the circular date stamp of his Post Office.

It is ironic that Charles Jennings in his "The History of British Security Stamps" says "...After this (1886) Braham appears to have disappeared from the scene and nothing more is known of him".)

The Secretary to the Post Office minuted the Controller of Stamps on 24th March 1906:

"Will you be good enough to report on the question whether arrangements could be made for the business of perforating stamps with initials to be undertaken officially, either at Somerset House or at the Contractor's works."

The Controller of Stamps replied on 10th April:

"I have spoken to the Contractors who state that they could not undertake the work of perforating the Stamps, and before I could report as to whether or not the work could be done here, it is necessary that I should have some idea as to the amount of work involved.

"I know that many Companies and Firms in London and elsewhere, who are large users of Stamps, have them perforated, and there are several Firms mentioned in the London Directory who undertake such perforation, who have, no doubt, laid out a certain amount of capital in machinery etc., and who would at first suffer if the Government took over the work. These Firms would, if I mistake not, after a little time, underbid any price the Government might fix, as they are in a position to do so by reason of their longer labour hours, and the smaller wages they pay their workmen, so that, in all probability, after a short time perforated Stamps would not be applied for here, but would be obtained in the cheaper market. Even if it were made obligatory for the perforation to be done here, I do not see how we could prevent others from doing it, as it would be practically impossible to distinguish our perforation from that of others.

"It is also conceivable that, if the perforation were done here before issue to the Public, Philatelists would regard each lot of Stamps bearing certain perforated letters as a distinct issue, and so create a fictitious value for the Stamps, thereby destroying the safeguard which the perforation was intended to set up.

"On the whole, my opinion is that it is better not to interfere with private enterprise"

It might be thought that this would settle the matter. In fact surveys were carried out to determine the magnitude of the problem. These showed that about 20 per cent of the 11 million letters posted in the E.C. district weekly and about 6 per cent of the 5 million articles delivered weekly bore perforated stamps.

On 18th July 1906 the Secretary of the P.O. minuted the Postmaster General as follows:

" I submit a report from the Controller of Stamps respecting your

enquiry whether it would be practicable for the Post Office to undertake the perforation of stamps with initials. It will be seen that he does not favour the adoption of such arrangement. The Stamp Contractors, Messrs. De la Rue and Company, state that they could not undertake the work for the Department; and if any arrangements of the kind were made it would probably be best that the work should be performed at Somerset House. In any case it would scarcely be practicable to prohibit private perforation; and if the Department competed with private firms, the latter would no doubt, as the Controller of Stamps points out, charge lower rates than any the Department might adopt, with the result that they would still secure the greater part of the work. In the enclosed papers Mr. Bruce has submitted a statement showing particulars of the perforation business performed by Town Sub-Postmasters in London. In two cases no charge is made and in the others the rates are low.

"Both Mr. Bruce and Mr. C. A. King are of the opinion that the work of perforating stamps with initials is best left to private enterprise; and on the whole I concur in that view.

"Mr. Bruce suggests that Sub Postmasters who undertake the work should be required to show on their order forms etc. that their stamp perforation business has no connection with the Post Office; and Mr. King suggests that a note should be added to the effect that the Postmaster General is not liable for the delivery of stamps perforated with initials. I recommend that these suggestions be adopted.

"The following statement now appears on page 139 of the Post Office Guide:- "Stamps may, however, be perforated with initials provided that the perforating holes are no larger than those dividing one stamp from another in a sheet of stamps." I recommend that a note be added to the effect that the work of perforating stamps with initials is left to private enterprise, and that any Sub Postmasters who undertake the business do so in their private capacity and not as agents of the Postmaster General, who has no responsibility in the matter."

This recommendation was adopted and a notice to that effect was

inserted in the Post Office Circular and ultimately incorporated in the Post Office Guide.

So ended a chapter in the history of our hobby, which has lain unsuspected in the Post Office archives for some 84 years.