

Perfins found on postage stamps can often be used to illustrate the history of a company. Here four will be used to show the development in Great Britain of the Vacuum Oil Company, later to become the Mobil Oil Company Limited.



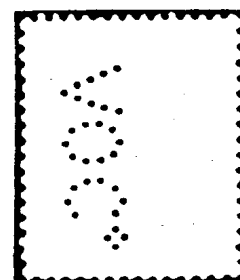
Mobil

The seeds for the company were first sown in Rochester (New York) in 1865 by a certain Matthew P Ewing. He was a carpenter by trade, but an inventor by nature, and had the idea that more kerosene (lamp oil) could be extracted from a barrel of crude oil if it was distilled under a vacuum. With some difficulty he eventually obtained financial backing (to the tune of \$20!) from the entrepreneur Hiram Bond Everest. Unfortunately, the new process failed to yield any more kerosene but Hiram was quick to realise that the oily residue left behind was far superior to any lubricant then on the market. This vacuum distillation process was patented by Ewing and Everest in September 1866, and on 4th October 1866 they founded the Vacuum Oil Company.

However, the UK story does not start until 20 years later when, in 1886, Charles Everest (son of Hiram) came to England and established the company's first overseas branch in Liverpool.

With the growing demand for high grade industrial lubricants a number of provincial branches were opened, and the head office for the UK moved from Liverpool to London – first to Norfolk Street (in 1893) and then in 1908 to Caxton House, Westminster. Throughout this period the perfin VOC° (V1320.01) was used and is known with Birmingham, Cardiff, Liverpool and London postmarks, the earliest reported date being 17th February 1892.

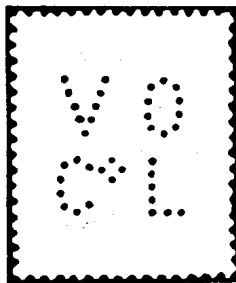
1890-1915



V1320.01

This first die was replaced in November 1915 by a Sloper multiheaded (1x5) machine No.62214 producing the initials VO/C°L (V1330.01M). The final 'L' reflected the 'Limited' liability status of the company when it became registered in 1901.

1915-1952

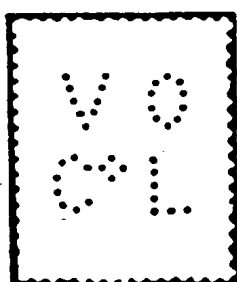


V1330.01M

A similar multi-headed machine (No.62324) was delivered in August 1919, and judging by the relative abundance of perfins, both appear to have seen plenty of use until well after the cessation of the second World War. The earliest and latest reported dates for this perfin are 7th February 1916 and 9th September 1947.

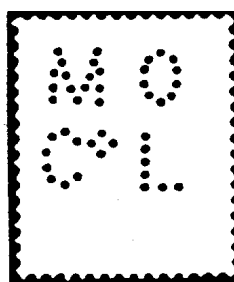
Sometime prior to this, c1945, the company began obtaining perfinned stamps direct from Slopers, who used a 12x1 multi-headed die with the letters VO/C°L (V1330.02M) for the purpose.

1945-1955



V1330.02M

1955-1960



M4290.01M

When the company name was changed in 1955 to become the Mobil Oil Company Limited, Slopers simply modified the existing die by making the 'V' into an 'M' producing MO/C°L (M4290.01M). This final die is known on QEII Wildings, but as no dated examples have yet been reported to me, the terminal date of 1960 must be regarded as very approximate.