

HATCHERS OF TAUNTON

Tim Read

A few weeks ago I purchased an Inland Revenue stamp with perfin die B&H – B6420.23 and in consulting the catalogue I found that the die



was probably used by Blake & Hatcher. This was great, as Hatchers is a well known Taunton department store and as a Taunton resident I was aware that the company was celebrating their 250th anniversary this year. Not many businesses will ever reach such a milestone. The only downside was that my stamp has a London E cancellation. London cancellations are not unknown on this die although the company had no operation there.

Hatchers was founded by William Hatcher in 1775 when he opened a small drapery business in Taunton. William's son, Thomas Hatcher continued the family business, becoming known locally as a Master Draper. Thomas's own son Demas again followed in the family tradition becoming an apprentice draper. Meanwhile, in 1799 Robert Newberry, also a draper, purchased a shop from Matthew Colman that he had operated since 1792 in premises at No.12 High Street (part of today's department store).

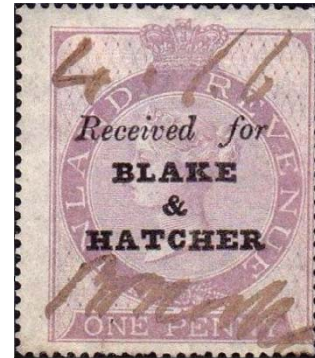
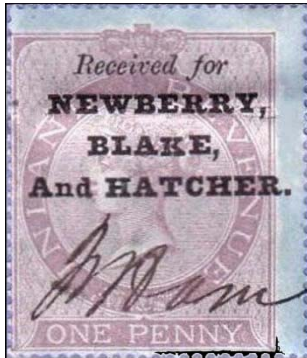
Robert took into partnership his son-in-law Rice Blake and they traded under the name of Newberry & Blake. Rice Blake's niece Catherine worked in the shop as a draper's assistant and it was here that the apprentice draper Demas Hatcher met and fell in love with Catherine. The couple married and it was this inter-marriage of families led to the formation of a new partnership, Newberry, Blake & Hatcher.

If the staffing is any indication, by 1861 the firm was a thriving concern, operating from 12 & 13 High Street. The premises over the shop now housed the families of both Rice Blake and Demas Hatcher. Together the household and staff numbered 25:- seven draper's assistants, four apprentices, a



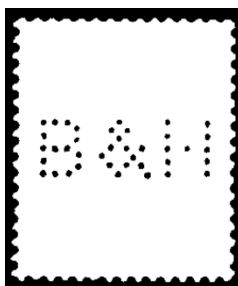
porter and five assistants.

Partner Robert Newberry died in 1866 after which the business became known as Blake & Hatcher. In 1869 the business interest expanded with the addition of a funeral service. By this time the company was using overprints on their receipt stamps.



Expansion continued in 1871 with the opening of a furniture shop at 33 The Parade, on the corner of Hammet Street. Here they sold 'spring and wool mattresses, iron and brass bedsteads, furniture and soft furnishings'. With the addition of furniture, upholstery and soft furnishings the offering had expanded to become what might better be described as a 'variety store'. It was under the name of Blake & Hatcher that they started to use perfin in 1874. Perfin B&H – B6420.23 is mainly found on the line engraved issue and remained in use until 1883 when the name of the company was changed.

1874 - 1883



B3420.23



Plate 217



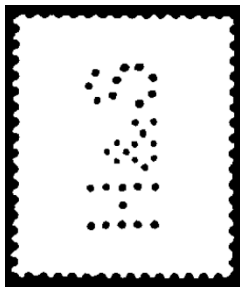
Plate 3



Plate 15

Two young sons of Demas Hatcher, Henry and Robert, joined the firm in 1876 and when Rice Blake retired in 1883 the partnership was dissolved and the business took on its current trading name of Hatcher & Sons. Obviously with Blake's retirement the perfin die was retired and a new one was procured – H&S – H6350.09. This die was used until the end of WWII by which time the die was in pretty bad condition and the die was retired. So after over 70 years of using perfins Hatcher's didn't bother to replace the die with another.

1883 - 1945



H6350.09



Ten years on and business was clearly going well as in 1893 plans were drawn up for the erection of a purpose-built furnishing shop at 54-55 High Street. The opening of the shop on 20th October 1894 merited eight column inches in the Somerset County Gazette. The building, which cost around £2,200, provided showrooms on the ground and first floors, a carpet planning room above and at the rear was a warehouse and workshops for the cabinet-makers, upholsterers and French Polishers.



11-13 High Street, Taunton

The old furniture shop on the Parade was closed after a sale starting in April 1894, the remaining stock being transferred to the new premises at 54 and 55 High Street. The next landmark in the history of the firm came in March 1898 when it became a Limited Company and took on its present name,

Hatcher and Sons Ltd. Among the first five directors were the two sons Henry and Robert. Robert became the first managing director of a concern which was then valued at £38,983. The value included an extension of the premises in 1892 which took in No.11 High Street.

In 1901 numbers 15-16 High Street (formerly Vile & Son) were also added, housing departments for china, glass, toys, a tea room and later the men's department. In 1928, the Company purchased the land and buildings it had long since operated in on a leasehold basis at 11, 12 & 13 High Street for a total sum of £8,000. In the 1930's, expansion continued into the adjoining premises with new leases being taken for Nos. 9 and 10 High Street. In 1941 the property at No.10 was

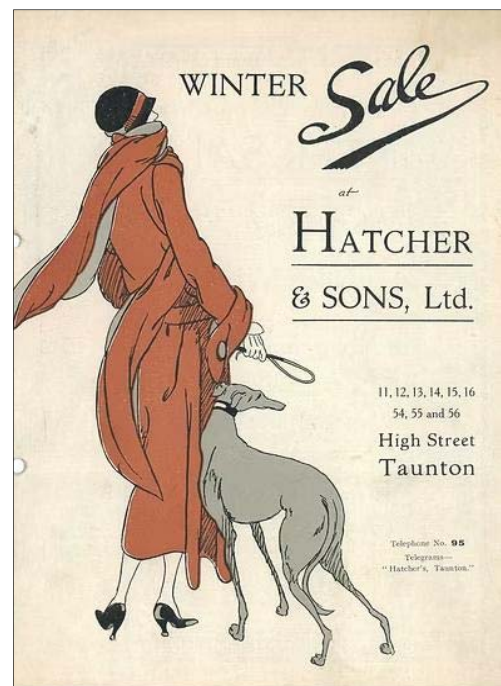
purchased by the Company for £2,750 and in 1943 the firm purchased No.9 High Street for £2,500, completing the premises as it stands today.



33 The Parade, Taunton

Arthur's younger brother Clifford joined the firm in 1941 and in 1961 his youngest brother Leslie (great-great-grandson of William Hatcher) became a Director and the last member of the Hatcher family to be involved in the business. During the 1960s and 1970s, as the Hatcher family generation changed, outside experienced management were brought in and joined the board to continue running the traditional family-owned store.

With the development of the Paul Street multi-storey car park and plans for a new shopping centre (now the Orchard Shopping Centre) in the late 1970's, it was decided that investment in the Store's future was essential. Proceeds from the sale of 15-16 High Street to Tesco for re-development as a supermarket and the sale of the furniture building at 54-55 High Street allowed for the yard, stables and outbuildings behind the premises at 9-13 High Street to be demolished to make way for a modern two storey extension to be built in 1982 to form the department store we see today.



By 1986, in the absence of any involvement of the Hatcher family, Hatcher's was seen as an ideal takeover opportunity by investment companies acting on behalf of larger national stores such as John Lewis and House of Fraser. But this they managed to avoid and they carry on trading as an independent shop today.