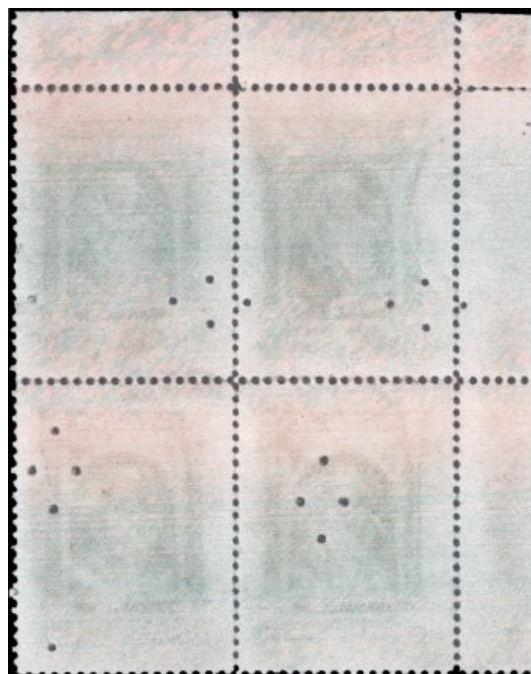


The 'Shakespeare Stamp'.

This marginal block of four was shown by **Richard Husband** at the Perfin Society meeting held at the NEC (Birmingham) during EuroPhilEx in May 2025, as well as a 1-pager in the October 2025 Bulltin. They're not Perfins as such as the stamps weren't valid for postage, but are interesting none the less.



The stamps in general were recess printed in sheets of 20 (4x5) and line perforated 14-14½ (initially) by **Bradbury Wilkinson & Co**, and came from one of the **97** sheets held in the company archives. For some reason, **68** sheets were also perforated with a diamond/lozenge shaped device, possibly to deter theft by employees. The material came into the public domain when the printers sold off their archive material in a public auction in 1993 (Christie's - Robson Lowe). From the study of these archive sheets published by Chris Harman, Richard has determined that his 2x2 block, based on their 11½-12 perfs, had been printed **post 1921**.

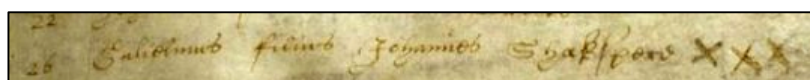
Spearheaded by the **Reverend George Arbuthnot** (1846-1922), who was the incumbent at the **Holy Trinity Church**, Old Town, Stratford upon Avon, from 1879-1908, the stamps were sold by the church from **1899** through to at least 1931 (last order placed 26th April 1931) so possibly the **mid-1930s**, in aid of the church restoration fund. The previous order was placed 26th March 1926, so it had lasted for 5 years. For a shilling, a visitor to the church could stick the stamp on a post card or letter and post it in a private post box on the church premises. The box would be emptied periodically and a church representative would affix the appropriate GPO postage stamp and then post it in a GPO Letter Box in Town for onward delivery. In passing, the Holy Trinity Church in Stratford upon Avon was the first church to charge an admission fee for visitors in **1896** - a modest 6d, which would equate today to £3.



Both **William Shakespeare** (1564-1616) and his wife **Anne Hathaway** (1566-1623) were interred side by side in **Holy Trinity Church**, hence the volume of visitors, although there is a charge of £5 these days to enter the chancel.

The inspiration for the stamp design was clearly taken from Shakespeare's funerary monument which is in the north wall of Holy Trinity Church.

It's not known when William Shakespeare (*Gulielmus Shakspere*) was born, but we know from the Parish Registers that he was baptised at Holy Trinity Church on 26th April **1564**.



Over the years the sheets of stamps were printed in several different colours, which (so it's said) totalled **eight** in all. **However**, Chris Harman's detailed study of the **97** archive sheets reveals no less than **35** recognisable colours. Richard Husband has suggested that to keep printing costs to a minimum, Bradbury Wilkinson may well have used ink left over from other printing jobs. Eight examples are shown below (all perforated 11½-12, so date to **1921 or later**), along with a copy of the **1964** reprint produced to commemorate the **400th** anniversary of Shakespeare's birth by *Avon Stamps of Broadway* (Worcestershire), and given away to customers. Also illustrated is the precursor for such Cinderella stamps, the 1d issue of **1864**! This was issued by the 'Wotking Men's Shakespeare Committee' who planned to erect a statue and shrine on Primrose Hill in London, to celebrate the Tercentenary of his birth. The cost of £3,000 was to be raised by subscriptions of 1d, and the 'stamp' was given as a receipt for each 1d donated. Sadly, the project never came to fruition, and it is not known what became of the Fund.



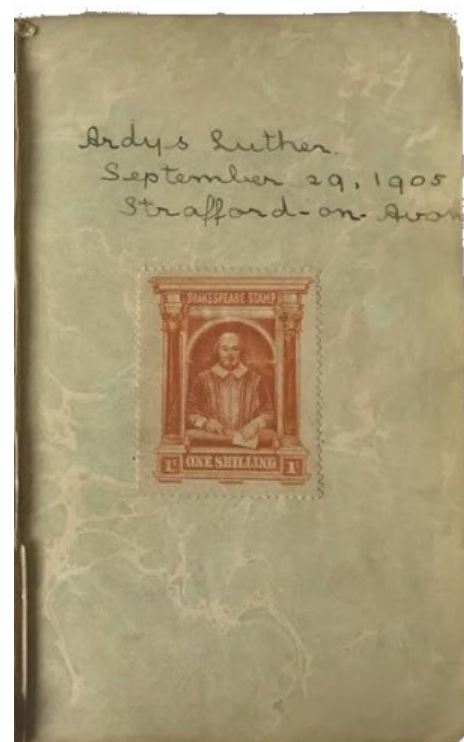
The stamps weren't intended to be cancelled, but these examples were and clearly show **STRATFORD-ON-AVON**, **10 JY/05** and **9 SP/06** cancels. They were on eBay in August and September 2025 for £75. and £17 respectively.



I thought I'd show you a couple of related items - sadly nothing to do with Perfins, but relevant to what's being discussed



The first is the use of one of the 'Shakespeare' stamps as a memento inside a 'Shakespeare Birthday Book', originally owned by a Ruth Clark, in which a reddish-orange stamp has been stuck to the inside page. It's likely that the 1905 date and inscription are contemporary with the stamp, but it could also just be a coincidence.



Of more interest is this image of a 'souvenir' card shown in the 'Gozo Philatelic Society Newsletter' N°. 87, 3/2022. The colours are deep ultramarine (1899), carmine (1900), deep blue-green (1901), slate-lilac (1902), and orange (ordered 16th May 1902) which was used to celebrate the coronation of King Edward VII, 9th August 1902.



The note at the bottom of the card explains all ... Letters or Cards for any part of the world, if posted in the Box at the Church door with one of these affixed, require no further payment.

Maurice Harp pointed me to these next three items on the **Grosvenor** philatelic auction house (Historic Sales) website. These have to be the 'crème de la crème'. The sale, N^o. 88, took place in April 2014.

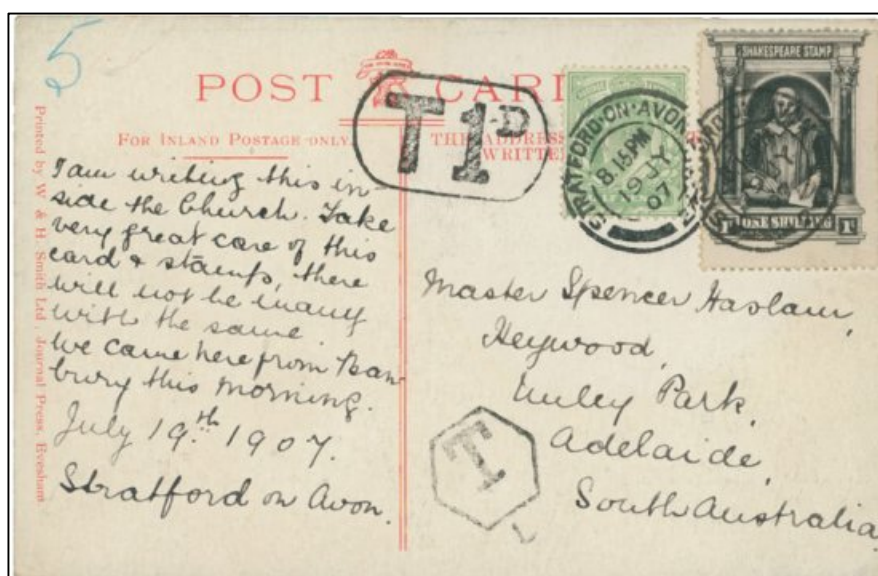
Lot 61 (Price realised £180).

A wonderful Post Card showing the use of the 'Shakespeare Stamp'. Chris Harman in his 1994 study quotes an earliest known use of 22nd August 1899, but here we see a Post Card posted to Paris on **10th June 1899**, with two QV ½d Jubilees added to cover the postage. The net gain to the 'Church Restoration Fund' was 11d (£6 today). The 'Shakespeare Stamp' is in deep ultramarine and would have come from the very first order for the 'stamps'.



Lot 64 (Price realised £160).

This second example was also posted abroad, this time though a little further afield, to South Australia! Unfortunately, on this occasion the church official got it wrong and only affixed the ½d inland rate rather than the 1d rate for abroad. This would have resulted in an extra halfpenny for the Church Funds, but the parents of young Spencer Haslam would have been charged a 1d. The recipient may well have been William Spencer Haslam (1895-1969) who is well documented on the Internet.



The practice of affixing the 'Shakespeare Stamp' on the same side of the postal item as the GPO stamp was tolerated for a while, but after 31st October 1908 it had to be affixed to the front of the Post Card (or the back of the envelope). Any items contravening this edict were returned to the Church for 'rectification'.

We couldn't finish without showing you a complete sheet of the stamps, a joy to behold ...

Lot 60 (Price realised £480). Complete sheets in red, orange, and blue. The red and orange sheets were perforated, presumably with the Bradbury Wilkinson 'Lozenge'.



They look to me to be in the 'original' *deep ultramarine* colour, which from Chris Harman's analysis of the archive sheets, was a popular colour, having been used on 7 separate occasions - in 1899, 1903/4, 1907, 1908*, 1923**, 1924**, and 1926**. Now where's that Stanley Gibbon's Colour Chart and perforation gauge?

Chris Harman states that over the 32 years that the stamps were printed (1899-1931),
Bradbury Wilkinson & Co used three different perforation gauges:

14-14.5	1899-1907
13-13.5	c1908*
14-14.5	1909-1921
11.5-12	1922-1931**

The sheet above has been perforated **14-14.5**, so may well be a sheet from the original order, and if not, then certainly from the first decade of the use of the stamp. Or perhaps I've got the colour wrong ...