

LEPARD & SMITHS LTD – SOCIETY PERFORATOR

James Norris

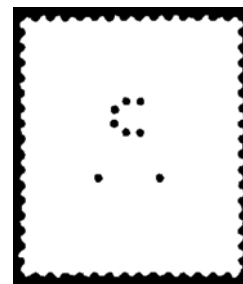
The Society Perforator has recently come to light after being in storage for approximately 40 years. The Perforator had been in the care of Chris Carr, (our late original Bulletin Editor), Chris was one of the founder members of The Perfin Society and the custodian of the press for many years.

Stephen Steere contacted me to see if I had any experience with perforator maintenance, as I was the owner of the J. Sloper Perforator for some years. (Bulletin 356 October 2008). I understand the mechanics of the press and felt confident that I could refurbish it to a working condition.

When I collected the press from Chris Carr's daughter, it looked to be in good condition, but evidently very dusty, and was not working. Luckily there was also a container accompanying the press labelled 'perforator pins' and so the task in hand looked to have a positive outcome.

The Perfin is L5090.03M - L&S/Ld, used by **Lepard & Smiths of**

London, the die is a four gang format arranged in a 2x2 configuration, and is illustrated in the Gault Catalogue.



C0020.01M. Chris Carr had modified the pin arrangement many years ago to create a Perfin C/.. for his private Perfin use,

by removing the majority of pins leaving just one die with "C/.."

The pins were ingeniously arranged in a 'C' by using the small arc of the 'D' of 'LD' with 2 pins below taken from the upright of the letter 'L'. The two single pins are thought to represent Chris's 'number 2 position' in list of founder members of our society.



A selection of Perfins produced by Chris during the life of the modified die. Most have Dover postmarks as this was where he was residing at the time.

So more about how the society acquired the perforator. Mr Derrick Muggleton wrote an article which appeared in Bulletin number 4, in October 1963;

PERFINS USED BY LEPARD & SMITHS LIMITED

By D. Muggleton.

*Type III L&S S 7,13,12 5,4½,4½
Type III L&S/Ld 2H 7,13,11/7,7 5½/5½, 3
The Company, who are paper manufacturers, originally started in 1757 with premises at the Southwark end of London Bridge. They later moved via various addresses to Covent Garden and in 1856 became a private partnership under the title Lepard and Smiths. The actual date when the L&S die first came into use is unknown, but it is believed to have been during the late 1880's and all stamps used from that time, and until 1891, will be found either with Covent Garden or with W.C.2. postmarks. In 1891 the Company*



L&S Warehouse 1888

*was formed into a Private Limited Company and further offices were opened in Southwark. The use of the L&S die was continued but a further postal district number appeared on their stamps, namely, S.E.1. Sometime around 1910 the L&S/Ld die superseded the original L&S and remained in use until 1929 on mail posted to addresses in the United Kingdom. From 1907 to 1929 for mail addressed to places within Great Britain the postmarks W.C.2. and E.C.4. will be found, but for mail sent abroad the postmark shows W.C.2. only and dates range from the 1880's to late 1940 when the use of the die was finally discontinued. The L&S/Ld machine contained four dies enabling a block of four to be punctured simultaneously. **During the early 1920's the lower four pins of the L in Ld of the upper right hand die became broken and were never repaired.***

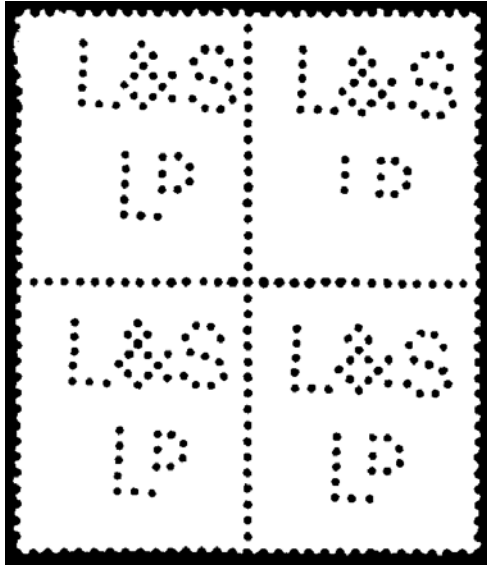
Little more can be added except to say they acquired warehouse premises in the 'Seven Dials Warehouse' – near to the Covent Garden district of London around 1889.

When the Society acquired the press Chris Carr wrote a follow up piece in Bulletin 50/51 in December 1963;

PERFORATING MACHINE. Through the good offices of Mr D. Muggleton, the Society has obtained on permanent loan, the machine belonging to Lepard & Smith Limited of London (L&S/Ld). Mr Carr has taken possession of it on behalf of the Society and will perforate stamps for use on the Society's correspondence. It is proposed to limit the quantity of any value perforated to something like 100 of each, but before fixing the actual quantity, we should like to know if there is interest amongst members for mint copies. Perhaps anyone interested would contact the Secretary.

The lower values will be used on posting the News-Sheet, so that used copies up to denominations of 2½d will automatically reach each member. Values higher than 3d, however, will have less frequent use. It is of interest to note, that apart from the 100 blocks of four of the ½d QE II perforated for use on the bulletin some two years ago, this machine has been out of use for many years.

History behind the die.



According to the Gault catalogue the press was in use between 1905 to 1940. Then again from April 1962 to July 1964 when 'The Security Endorsement & Perfin Society of GB' used it on loan. The Perfin is also known applied sideways. The address for Lepard & Smiths at that time was Wholesale Stationers Great Earl Street, WC2. After 1940 the machine ceased to be used commercially.

Illustrated opposite is a full strike from the 1960's showing the missing four pins from the top right die. This is where the modifications to the pin configuration were affected by Chris Carr.

Chris also used the press to initial the letter 'C' on to the coloured glass slipper triangular stamps printed by Jay Nesbitt which was used in 'The Alnis Guide to the Perfins of Ceylon and Sri-Lanka' published by Albert George P. Ellis in 1988.



The press is something of a leviathan, it weighs over 7 kg and measures 11" x 4" at the base and stands 10" high. For such a large press it is very decorative, with black and gold paint work in a floral design.

The first task was to carefully dismantle the press, and give it a thorough clean. The principle of perforating is basic mechanics with only a few moving parts, although the tolerance of the mating parts is crucial to allow all the pins to align accurately. It was clogged with decades of dust and compressed 'chad' (small discs of paper left over from the perforating process), which had blocked the stripping plate and was preventing the pins from passing through the plate and jettisoning the new fragments of 'chad'. This was the likely the original cause of the several broken pins referred to in the article

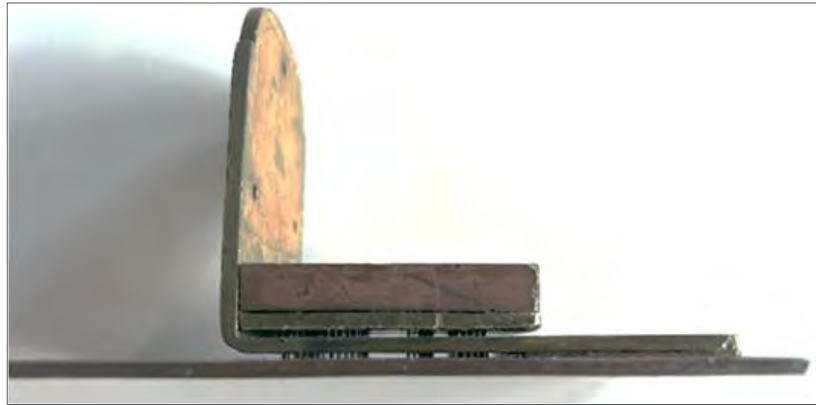
above. The upper right-hand die was the worst affected, (letters LD), but as all of the pins act together in one single motion, the pins could not puncture the stamps evenly, resulting in damage to that portion of the die. In total 12 pins were found to be bent, broken, too corroded or completely missing. Some had signs of surface rust, and so all had to be soaked in penetrating oil before restoration could begin.

Upon inspection it was evident that there were insufficient pins to complete the work, but enough to complete three of the dies - the pin diameter is 0.85mm x 12mm long, and a search for replacements has proved to be unsuccessful but is on-going.





Component parts of the press after dismantling, showing cast iron body, die plate and stripper plate, cam action operating lever, die with threaded attachment plate, linear return spring, tapered pivot pin fixing screws and two single pins for size comparison.



Above, side view showing stripper plate detached from base, but still containing the pins, above the die block and retaining plate, the brass guide plate is attached to the front of the press in an L shape, as well as to the base plate, and second view with complete assembly removed.



Close up end view (left) showing aperture and hole in piston where lever spring locates, and top view (centre) with the cam lever removed exposing the actuating piston which attaches directly to the die plate. Aperture in underside of base (right) showing mounting hole for the linear return spring.



Unassembled views of the bottom of the steel stripper plate (left) and the mating brass die plate (right) with all available pins now in situ.

With the press reassembled, it was found that the return spring no longer worked effectively, and may well have lost its torsional strength. The result of this means on the down stroke the path of the pins enters and clears the die stripper plate, but on the up stroke it does not automatically return to the up position – the pins stay seated in the stripper plate. The die needs to be ‘coaxed’ to return to the start position manually. It was possible to produce an impression of the Perfin successfully, and the scan opposite shows how it looks today, using all available pins.



If at some point in the future replacement pins can be sourced, it will be possible to fully restore the press to original working condition. As there is no longer any demand for such precision pins

the specialist companies that produced them sadly no longer seem to exist.



Shown here is a selection of Perfins used through the reigns and the life of the die – the missing pin variety appears on the QEII ½d block of four.

The Perforator will be on display at the **EuroPhilEx** event in Birmingham next year, where the society will have a stand – details to follow.

Perfin illustrations from the collection of **Roy Gault** and **Melvyn Green**.



Self addressed cover with QEII 26p commemorative with private perfin
C/. . - C0020.01M