

## A PENANG CONUNDRUM

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I recently acquired a cover which was sent from Penang to Stuttgart in December 1904 bearing three contemporary KEVII Straits Settlement stamps all with the perfin S.K./C. This is identified in Jeff Turnbull's Malayan perfins catalogue as being used by Schmidt Küstermann & Co of Penang. They used two perfins.

1874 – 1890's

1882 - 1908

They were a German and Swiss owned importer & exporter who set up first in Singapore, then establishing a branch in Penang in 1858. They built the Schmidt Küstermann Building on Weld Quay, Penang in the 1890s. With the outbreak of the First World War their business suffered and in 1917 the building was sold off to Heah Swee Lee, a local tycoon. The company was finally wound up in 1922.



The conundrum lies in the fact that the envelope bearing the S.K./C. perfin stamps is imprinted Behn, Meyer & Co. Penang.

Behn, Meyer & Co was another import-export company with German founders who began trading in Singapore in 1840, opening a branch in Penang in 1891, they moved to new premises on Weld Quay in the late 1890s. Jeff Turnbull's catalogue records that they used three perfins.

B.M  
& Co

1879 – 1904  
Singapore

B.M.C.

1903 – 1914  
Penang

B.M.C.

1905 – 1914  
Singapore

They too went out of business in the First World War but began trading again in 1922 only to close once more when the Japanese invaded in the Second World War. In 1946 they reopened the business and continue to trade today, headquartered in Singapore and operating in 14 other countries.

But why did one company use the other's envelope, or indeed why did one use the other's stamps? The answer may lie in the close proximity of their addresses on Weld Quay as they were neighbours. The Schmidt Küstermann Building is now partly occupied by the Royale Bintang Hotel and next door, to the left in the picture below, were Behn, Meyer's offices, which are now the Penang Interactive Museum.

