

FOUND - A 'LOST' PERFIN.

Roy Gault

When the '*New Illustrated Catalogue of GB Perfins*' (NIC for short) was first envisaged in **1994**, the operative word was 'Illustrated'. This was also the first time that GB stamp details and postmarks etc., were routinely recorded, and I'm sure that the expectation was that all the dies we knew of at that time would eventually have sufficient information from which a realistic 'die in use' date range could be established. However, thirty years on we still have **149** (soon to be **148!**) GB Perfin Dies for which we have no stamp details. Enter **William Hall**, our Auctioneer, who is currently going through his 'shoebox' of post 1880 QV stamps. He's only completed letters 'A' and 'B' so far, (he has after all, a full-time job as well as running our Society Auction), but his latest 'find' deserves to be highlighted. It doesn't look much, indeed it's only a partial of "**B&P/M**" (B5835.01).



The die wasn't listed in Van Lint (1959), but it was in Tilles (1975) as B538A (shown above). It became B5835.01 in June 1986 when Tony Edwards produced Section 'B' of what became the 'Edwards-Gault' Illustrated Catalogue, and sadly, no-one reported having an example when I prepared the draft for Section 'B' of the '**NIC**' (2012). But now, joy of joys, we have an example with a large part CDS. The date is legible and reads **1 FE 1/98**, so I can happily allocate the die an 1895-1900 'die in use' date range. We've answered 'when' the die was used, but how about 'where'? Symmetry of the postmark and the black bars tells us that the place-name is long and ends in an '**R**', and probably '**ER**'. With an '**M**' prominent in the Perfin the chances are that the '**M**' is for the place-name (possibly 'Manchester'), and we're looking for two partners with surnames beginning with '**B**' and '**P**'.

Lancashire is a notoriously difficult county to find Trade directories for, but luckily I do have access to two editions that straddle the 1898 date on the stamp - 1895, and 1903.

The **1895** directory produced no matches under the trades people listed under the letter 'M' (I searched just in case my original assumption was wrong), but did produce a *solitary hit* under the surnames beginning with 'B' - '**Brittain & Picton**', who probably hadn't been in business together very long based on the entry shown below.

Brittain & Picton (successors to the Exors. of Francis Kay), wood, tin, copper & zinc packing case makers, New Wakefield st — Pay day, first Tuesday in the month—T N 249 Nat. 633 New

A solitary hit is good as long as they stayed the course, and although the **1903** edition listed *five* possibilities, '**Brittain & Picton**' was one of them!

Brittain & Picton, wood, tin, copper & zinc packing case makers, New Wakefield st—Pay day, first Tuesday in the month—T N 249 Nat

However, there's no mention of '**Brittain & Picton**' in a **1909** edition.

So we now know who the possible user of the 'Lost' Perfin was, '**Brittain & Picton**', but can we put any 'flesh on the bones'? 'Picton' is the more unusual of the two names, so I plumped to follow that line of enquiry using the resources available to me on **FindMyPast**. Searching the 1901 Manchester census I came across this family ...

Thos Henry Picton	Head	M	46	Wood Packing Case Maker	Worker	Lancs Manchester
Mary Ann	Wife	M	45			Do Do
James	Son	S	21	Wood Packing Case Maker	Worker	Lancs Little Hulton
Ann	Daughter	S	16	Card Board Box maker	Do	Do Manchester
Alda	Do	S	13	Manilla Maker	Do	Do Do
John Picton	Father	Wid	75	Wood Packing Case Maker	Employer	Lancs Do

Here we see **John Picton**, widower aged 75 recorded as a '**Wood Packing Case Maker**' - '**Employer**', living with his son, Thomas Henry Picton, aged 46, also listed as a 'Wood Packing Case Maker'. Indeed, Henry's son, James Picton, aged 21, is also described as a 'Wood Packing Case Maker', so three generations are in the business.

There is also mention of a John Picton, aged 13, in the 1841 Manchester Census, living with his family. His father was Henry Picton, a Packing Case Maker!

Now that we know a little bit more about one of the partners it makes sense to find out when he died. If aged 75 in 1901, then he would have been born c**1826**. There is a record of a John Picton, aged 80 years, dying in Chorlton (Manchester) 1st Qtr **1907**. Here is his probate record, in which he leaves £918 - just over £100,000 today.

PICTON John of 37 Burman-street Higher Openshaw Manchester died 23 February 1907 at 324 Oxford-road Chorlton-upon-Medlock Manchester Probate **Manchester** 20 April to Frederick William Picton commercial-clerk Effects £918 6s.

Following a similar path for the other partner, we also find in the 1901 Stretford (Manchester) census, a **James Brittain**, who is a 57 year old '**Packing Case Maker**' - '**Employer**'. His 30 year old son, W^m G Brittain, is also employed in the family business as a Clerk.

James Brittain	Head	M	57	Packing Case maker	Employer	James H. Brittain
Elizabeth Ann do	Wife	F	56			" Openshaw
Wm G. do	Son	S	30	Clerk (Case Making)		" Haulme
May do	Daughter	S	21	Industry		" "
Fred do	Son	S	18	Clerk (Shipping)		" "
James H. Brittain	Boarder	S	18	Provision Merchant	Worker	" "

Although James Brittain was the younger partner, he was in fact the first to die in **1903** as his Probate record shows. He left £2,011 to his wife Elizabeth Ann Brittain, which equates to £225,000 today.

BRITTAIN James of 17 Moreton-avenue Stretford Manchester packing-case-maker died 12 May 1903 Administration **Manchester** 11 August to Elizabeth Ann Brittain widow Effects £2011 14s. 11d.

The only real piece of information picked up in the newspapers comes from the London Gazette for 5th September **1894**, in which '**Brittain & Picton**' are listed as being owed £155 by 'Bell & Campbell' (Shipping Merchants), probably worth in excess of £18,000 today.

BELL & CAMPBELL			
(James K. Bell), Merchant, 44, Bloom Street,			
MANCHESTER (Recd. Goods)			
Brittain & Picton	Manchester 155 0 0

In memoriam

James Brittain (1844-1903) John Picton (1826-1907)

Although I have no evidence that James Brittain and John Picton were ever Trade Union members, it is true that there was a Trade Union set up specifically to cater for workers involved in the making of wooden packing cases in Manchester. What follows is courtesy of Wikipedia.

*The union was founded 9th June **1825** as the ‘**Manchester and Salford Trunk and Packing Case Makers’ Friendly, Relief and Burial Society**’. Initially, all members had to have completed an apprenticeship in the trade, and to agree not to undertake piecework. Because most of the boxes made were for textile products, the union worked closely with those in the cotton trade, rather than other unions of woodworkers.*

*Membership of the union remained very small for many years: only 161 in 1849, rising to 360 in 1899. It tried to broaden its membership base, becoming the ‘**Manchester, Salford and Bolton Wood Packing Case Makers’ Society**’ in **1892**, and unsuccessfully trying to recruit workers in the trade on lower wages in both 1900 and 1905. These workers instead formed a rival ‘**Manchester and Salford Wood Packing Case Makers (No 2 Society)**’, which finally merged into the original union in **1910**.*

After World War I, the society again broadened its remit, accepting box makers from 1917, child workers from 1918, and workers undertaking piecework from 1919. This took the membership to over 1,000, and from 1918 the union was able to employ a full-time general secretary.

*The cotton industry declined in Lancashire throughout the 20th century, and the union began recruiting more workers involved in making packaging for heavy engineering products, such workers making up 90% of the total by the 1970s. It also recruited palette makers and some people involved in other areas of woodwork, and in recognition of this adopted its final name in **1945** - the ‘**Lancashire Box, Packing Case and General Woodworkers’ Society**’.*

*The union was still active in the mid-1980s, with around 500 members. However, in **1993** it merged into the ‘**Transport and General Workers’ Union**’, which is now part of ‘**Unite**’.*