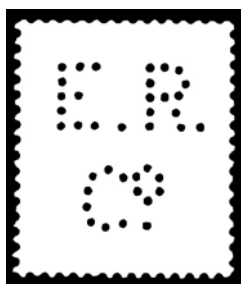


SAILCLOTH, ROPES, AND RUBBER?

Roy Gault

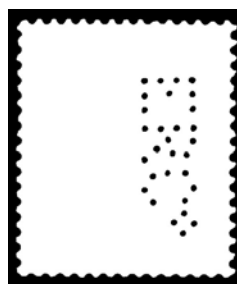
Since time immemorial, well since January 1958, these two dies have been positively 'identified' as having been used by the '*Edinburgh Rubber Co*' based in Leith. Cover details weren't recorded that far back in our history, but there was no reason to be suspicious as the initials fitted perfectly, the Leith postmarks tallied, and one ran on chronologically from the other.

1908-1920



E3860.01

1920-1939



E3850.01

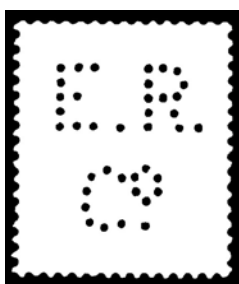
However, in December 2020 *Stephen Steere* spotted this PPC on eBay with "ERC" (E3850.01) with an earlier known date than previously recorded, and more importantly, a user that's different to the one that's been accepted for the last sixty-three years!



But the question is, are the two companies in any way connected which would enable them both to use the same “ERC^o” die? The truth is that I can find nothing to tie them together, so I believe the two dies should be treated *separately*, each used by a *different* company.

Let’s look first at “E.R./C^o.” (E3860.01), in use in Leith 1908-1920. The inverted and reversed Perfins shown below point to a company owned perforating press. The ‘*Edinburgh Rubber Co*’ first appears in Edinburgh Trade Directories in 1906, an entry that may well have been submitted in 1905. Their address is given as 180 & 182 Rose St, Leith. There is also an entry in a Stock Exchange book that shows ‘*Edinburgh Rubber Estate, Selangor, Ltd*’ being registered in Edinburgh in 1909, which is probably connected with the company. The ‘Estates’ company entered voluntary liquidation in Jan 1920, but was immediately reconstructed as ‘*Edinburgh Rubber Estates Ltd*’.

1908-1920



E3860.01

The earliest newspaper report I could find for the ‘*Edinburgh Rubber Co*’ is from the Falkirk Herald, 22nd March 1905 - a court case involving the theft by Dock Labourers at Grangemouth, of Whisky and Shoes from the hold of the steamer ‘Peveril’. There were 156 cases of rubber shoes all marked ‘*Edinburgh Rubber Co*’, from which the labourers were accused of stealing 4½ *pairs* - why the half defeats me!

Turning our attention next to “ERC^o” (E3850.01), in use 1920-1939. This is an interesting Perfin as all the stamps come from *coils* and would have been applied to the postal items using a mechanical ‘affixer’. Based on the evidence from existing examples, the affixer was almost certainly an American hand operated ‘Multipost’ affixer.



An advertisement from the 1920's tells us '*The Edinburgh Roperie & Sailcloth Co Ltd*' was originally established in 1750 - until 1883 it was known simply as the 'Edinburgh Roperie Co'. The advertisement also uses an image of a sailing ship showing the vast expanse of sailcloth and literally miles of rope required to rig a sailing ship!



The same advertisement also gives an impressive list of Branches in the UK, as well as Foreign & Colonial Agents.

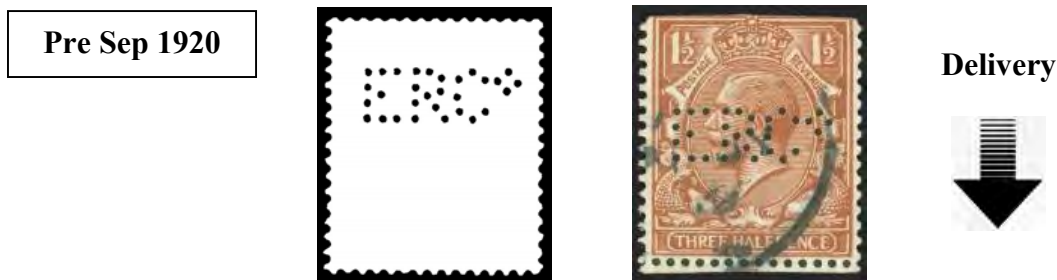
Home Branches :		Colonial Agencies :		Foreign Agencies :	
<i>Succursales de l'intérieur :</i>		<i>Agences aux Colonies :</i>		<i>Agences à l'étranger :</i>	
Sucursales en el país:		Agencias en las Colonias:		Agencias en el Extranjero:	
LONDON.	YARMOUTH.	MELBOURNE.	VANCOUVER.	PARIS.	ALEXANDRIA.
LIVERPOOL.	LOWESTOFT.	SYDNEY, N.S.W.	CAPE TOWN.	AMSTERDAM.	BUENOS AIRES.
CARDIFF.	GLASGOW.	CHRISTCHURCH, N.Z.	JOHANNESBURG.	COPENHAGEN.	RIO DE JANEIRO.
HULL.	ABERDEEN.	MONTREAL.	PORT ELIZABETH.	BERGEN.	VALPARAISO.
NEWCASTLE.	PETERHEAD.	TORONTO.	DURBAN.	CHRISTIANIA.	SANTIAGO.
				ATHENS	LIMA.

The manufacture of ropes involves very long buildings in which the individual plant fibres are twisted into ropes - the 'Roperie' in Bath Street, Leith, was said to be the 6th longest in the world!



We now know from Steve’s PPC that ‘*The Edinburgh Roperie & Sailcloth Co Ltd*’ used “ERC^o” (E3850.01). Usually, a mixture of upright and sideways orientations of Perfins implies the perforating press was owned by the company, rather than a supplier of perforated stamps (such as Sloper & Co), but here we can read much more into it.

State 1 - Initials upright, watermark upright - *vertical delivery coils*.



Here, vertical delivery coils (rolls) have been perforated (probably by J Sloper & Co) with an upright “ERC^o” *prior to use* in a Multipost Affixer. The coils themselves were made by coil-joining every 20th stamp, and so it’s possible to find examples still with their coil-join selvedge intact. My example *doesn’t* have a coil join, but clearly shows the straight-cut vertical sides produced during manufacture, and the cut top & bottom produced by the severing blade in the ‘Multipost’ affixer (made in the USA by the Merkhams Trading Company).

State 2 - Initials sideways, watermark upright - *s/w delivery coils*.



For years the Merkhams Trading Company pressed the Post Office to produce rolls of stamps with a *sideways delivery* format, in line with American practice. Eventually the Post Office agreed and produced ‘Left Side Delivery’ coils in August/September 1920. Again, the rolls were made up from sheets, but this time by joining the side selvedge producing a coil join every 12th stamp. For a fee of £2, the Merkhams Trading Company offered to convert existing Multipost machines to take the new sideways delivery coils.

The next change came in 1924 when the stamp printing contract passed from *Harrison & Sons* to *Waterlow & Sons*. The watermark also changed to Block Cypher, and coil production was improved by using a continuous printing technique - a technique that produced sideways watermarks on s/w delivery coils. The new coils for Multipost affixers were available from July 1924.

State 3 - Initials sideways, watermark sideways - *s/w delivery coils*.



The Perfin usually reads *down* the stamp, but on occasions it can be found reading *up* the stamp (as in the 1d ‘Q’ above). [A right-handed person would naturally produce Perfins reading down the stamp, whereas a left-handed person would produce them reading up the stamp]. Joined horizontal pairs may also be found, *proving* the coils were perforated *before* use in the ‘Multipost’ affixer - the pair of 1½d ‘M’ illustrated below is postmarked LEITH D.O., 27 DE 37.

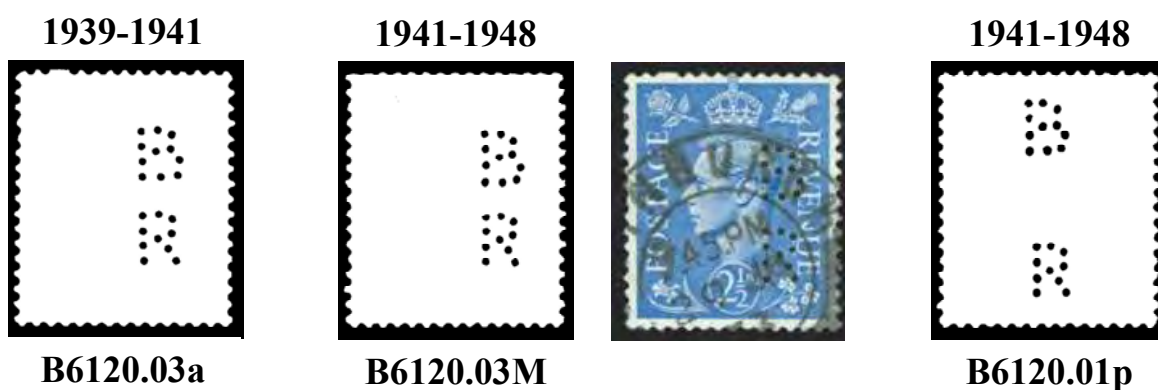


Another change that took place in 1924 was the formation of ‘*British Ropes Ltd*’ (which was incorporated on 6th June 1924), created through a merger of eight companies. Seven of these made wire rope, and one made fibre products such as binder twine. More companies were added in 1925, including ‘*The Edinburgh Roperie and Sailcloth Co Ltd*’, with still more joining in 1926.

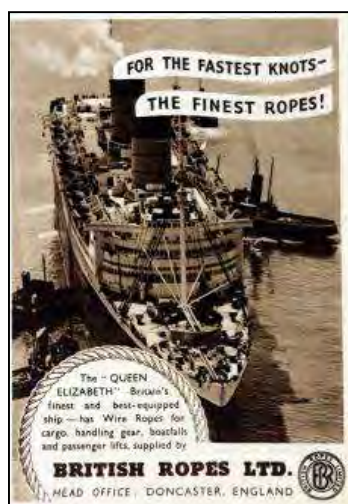
The involvement with ‘*British Ropes Ltd*’ had no effect on the use in Leith of the “**ERC**” Perfin, which continued to be used into the early years of King George VI’s reign, say c1939 - see the 1d ‘Q’ above.

‘British Ropes Ltd’ did eventually use Perfins themselves in the shape of “**B/R**” supplied by J. Sloper & Co. Unfortunately, Sloper’s also used the same Perfins to perforate stamps for ‘A. Boake, Roberts & Co Ltd’ who were Manufacturing Chemists in London E15. Without an Edinburgh or Leith postmark on a loose stamp, it would be impossible to say with any certainty that it was used by ‘British Ropes Ltd’.

Three different “**B/R**” dies were used during the WWII period and immediately afterwards. The first to be used was a short-lived ‘Sloper Refurbishment’ die, B6120.03a, which would have been destroyed in the “Blitz” on Sloper’s premises in May 1941. This die had been specifically made for use on s/w delivery coils.



The replacement was B6120.03M, a regular Sloper multi-headed die with 6 patterns used specifically to initial sideways delivery coils. *Edinburgh* postmarks are known (example shown), so it would have been used in the ‘Roperie’. Also used during this period was a Sloper Wartime Provisional, B6120.01p, known used as late as 3rd October 1948, but not known if by ‘Boake Roberts’ or ‘British Ropes’. Sadly, the ropeworks closed in 1960, production being transferred to London.



If anyone can add any more information, cover postmarks, dates, then I’d be pleased to hear from you!