

An Impression Of My Visit To Slopers Works by Dave Hill.

A small Victorian, even Dickensian, works in a not very salubrious part of N.W. London behind West Hampstead tube station. Having said that, I have to agree with Mr.Cokayne that had they not kept down the cost of what they produce and spent more money on the works they would not have survived over a hundred years.

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One or perhaps two women perforate stamps, 3-5 days per week as required using single or 12 headed dies. This is the significance of the 1 or 12 in the record book of dies which is kept by Slopers although they perforate 10 stamps at a pass. These machines are more complex than the dies you see in machines sold to companies to perforate their own stamps. This is because the ones at Slopers have to be changed frequently from one perfin to another. Once there were 12 or more women perforating stamps each day in the years between the wars at New Bridge Street, London EC1.

Perhaps a die wears and they make a new one but its just an engineering job as long as it perforates the stamps all right. Although they use templates the new die will not necessarily be identical to the old one. Indeed, they might get a small order from a new client and have a similar die which they will simply modify in case they get no more orders; perhaps taking the pins from the leg of an 'R' to make a 'P' which would not be as the 'P' template. As a die wore they put in progressively larger pins. This is not to say they have not made machines with different heads.

Each job was looked at primarily from the engineering standpoint. I very much doubt that they ever consciously made different dies for different branches of the same company unless they were asked. If they were asked, the differences would be major ones, not secret marks as is sometimes thought.

Other machines are made to do with security endorsing, i.e. dating or numbering, which require constant changing and these are very neat but again cost is the prime factor. However clever a machine might be, if it is too dear it will not sell.

These machines would work on a slightly different principle to the perfin machine. If I understood correctly, they have in effect pins which retract into holes which somehow prevent the pins perforating. The perfin machine I think always has pins in the shape of the letters and the corresponding holes.

Mr.Cokayne is primarily an Engineer, and prototype and other light engineering work is carried out by the firm.