

My first thought, on hearing that Slopers' business was to be taken over and the Company's premises at Hampstead and their contents disposed of, was that something should be done without delay to ensure that records and other items of interest to the Society should not be irrecoverably lost. I need not have been concerned. Stephen Steere had already made approaches to the Company on the Society's behalf and I was privileged to accompany him to Hampstead on a hot August afternoon to see what was on offer.

Assembled in the outer office by Bill Cokayne of Slopers and Peter Rooke of Checkpoint, was an assortment of items including documents, record books, ledgers, string-Bound bundles of papers and dusty picture frames. Our discussions with them as to what the objects were and what they might be worth were frequently interrupted by the noise of old iron being thrown into a skip outside by workmen clearing the accumulation of years from all corners of the workshop floor.

Our offer of £350 on behalf of the Society was accepted in respect of everything of interest to us apart from the original Letters Patent granted to Joseph Sloper and various subsequent patents obtained by the Company. Peter Rooke had been advised that these were of considerable value to collectors of such documents and arrangements were in hand for them to be sold through a leading auction house. Although the Society would like to have owned the patent documents, it was felt that their usefulness as a source of research was limited and that our resources did not permit us to compete in the antique document market. Later we made an offer of £100 but this was rejected.

I have provided the Secretary with a detailed inventory of all the items acquired. It is too long to reproduce here but the following summary may be of interest:

Letters, documents and papers - Fifteen original items dated between 1868 and 1894 including the letter of 13th March 1868 (framed) authorising Joseph Sloper to introduce his system of perforation of postage stamps.

Account books and staff records - Various private ledgers of the Company 1941-58, petty cash analysis books 1964-74, staff record books 1962-70 and tools and machinery expenditure records 1902-70.

Perforating press order and impression books - Twenty-five books recording details of perforating presses supplied to customers between 1862 and 1938 but with many serious gaps - particularly in the early years.

Post-war stamp perforating records - Two large loose-leaf leather-bound ledgers A-K and L-Z containing details of customers to whom Slopers supplied perforated stamps and over-printed receipt stamps with examples of dies and overprints. No dates are given but the books would appear to relate wholly to the period from the Second World War. There are also two supplementary record books of a similar nature.

Metal items - These include a quantity of 12-over modern brass and steel perforating dies, the three original engraved steel blocks used in the printing of the front cover of Sloper's 'Five Reigns' booklet, a hand ticket clipper and a quantity of individual non-philatelic perforating dies.

Miscellaneous - Such items include:

A bundle of old papers, mainly sketches and short specifications of perforating machines made for named customers.

A quantity of copies of the booklet entitled 'A History of J. Sloper & Co's Stamp Security Service Through Five Reigns' (Copies on sale from the Publications Officer)

A framed photograph of a procession passing Slopers' premises in King William Street and a framed print showing the exterior and interior of the later offices in Budge Row.

A quantity of white plastic carrier bags on which is Slopers' advertisement.

As we departed from Tower Royal Works, Stephen Steere and I, at great personal risk, recovered from the skip outside several old cheque crossing, dating and cancelling perforators as well as a rocking type railway ticket dating perforator. These will be disposed of in due course.

The most important acquisitions were, in my view, the old letters, documents and papers and the modern stamp perforating record books. There is much work to be done on the latter but together with other material previously obtained from Slopers by Stephen Steere it should be possible to construct a complete and reliable record of the Company's post-war stamp perforating business.

My greatest disappointment was the complete absence of anything at all on the supply of perforated stamps to customers between 1868 and the 1940's. I am finally obliged to accept that everything on this subject was in fact destroyed in the bombing of the Budge Row premises in 1941 as had been stated by Slopers for some years. The records of perforating presses supplied to customers survived only because they were kept at Hampstead where all the engineering work was carried out.

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