

AN INCOMPLETE HISTORY OF STAMP AFFIXING MACHINES

Dave Hill

Like most technical advances, the history of affixing machines, as told in the PO Archives, is filled with the optimistic claims of inventors, the pleas of interested users, and the exaggerated difficulties of the establishment. There were many potential inventors who were convinced they could ease the "licking and sticking" of the 1000's of stamps used by businesses in the early 1900's IF the PO could be persuaded to provide the stamps in a suitable form. Then, they thought, businesses would fall over one another to take up such an invention.

The files in the PO Archives present a plethora of facts, unfortunately ordered in a way only known to some long dead clerk. One is tempted astray by interesting but misleading false trails, and long official reports deter the writer from his goal. Hence the "incomplete" history.

The first mention appears to be an **"Automatic Postage Stamp Dampening and Affixing Machine, Springers and Myers Patent 1908, Liverpool"**. The claim that it used stamps from sheets or rolls, meant I think, that the sheets had to be made up into rolls! The inventors were "two Trinidad Gents", one a clergyman and the agent in the UK was the brother of one.

It seems to have been given practical expression by a E C Hunton, who talked the PO into giving a trial at Throgmorton Street PO, in the City of London. The user inserted his penny (it refused foreign coins!), offered his envelope or package, pulled the handle smartly (but not too smartly - it broke once) and the machine affixed a id stamp.

On the other hand if the handle was not pulled smartly enough only part of the stamp was stuck or it adhered somewhere in the machine. After a few weeks trial it became obvious that without the attendance of Hunton or his operator, the machine was far from trustworthy. They kept a supply of "coppers" to recompense users who did not get a stamp, later recovering the stamps from inside the works of the machine. The high usage was mostly mail processed by the inventors. Usage by the public was only about £2 per week and the PO asked for the machine to be removed. Stamp affixing was not as easy as at first thought.

Prior to the trial of the machine someone had done a good PR job, articles praising the machine appeared in many provincial newspapers. This produced lots of requests for machines and stamp coils to fit them. At the same time the better known trials of the **Kermode** stamp vending machines were being made at a number of other London PO's.

In 1909 the **Merkham Trading Co.** said they were the patentees of an English machine but drew attention to an advert for an American machine in "Office Appliances". Later they had installed five machines, one at Remington Typewriter Co. for £5 and it could be operated by anyone. They asked why we could not provide stamps in coils as did the US PO. Upon enquiry it was found that the US were making coils from sheets, sticking them every 10th stamp as we did. Still later Merkham said they were selling machines to the US where they became "Multipost".

[Ed:- In Bulletin 254 (October 1991) Roy Gault wrote an in-depth article about Perforated Coil Stamps in which the Multipost machine was fully explained. Later, in Bulletin 271 (August 1994) there is an illustration of one of the advertising labels for the Multipost and in 274 (Feb' 95) two illustrations of the Multipost Advertising Labels for the US market.]

Solicitors Radcliffe, Carter and Hood acted for the patentees of another machine, **Daniel, Bullock and Burton** (or was it the first one resurrected?). The machine dampened the envelope (not the stamp) and had a stamp counter under a locked cover. It would reduce labour and prevent theft. They wanted the PO to make up coils and did not see why they should go to the expense of buying 100's of sheets of stamps and the machinery to make the coils as well as the expense of building the affixer. Eventually they offered to pay, for 3 years, the wages of the girls making the coils. By 1910 **The International Stamping Machine Co.** had taken over this machine.

In that year the **BEAM** machine had 5 separate rolls of stamps and they could be perforated with any initial. The PO was put off by the trial of the first machine and the differing requirements of various machines, so they circularised the manufacturers asking what size core they wanted, how many stamps, and what delivery.

The **BEAM** machine (REX? The first machine was so called as well) needed a 1 1/4" core, bottom feed. Harrison were already making coils and they could be perfinned.

C **MICHAELSON** wanted a 1" core (but it could be larger) and bottom feed. He was in Edinburgh but all his machines had been supplied to Glasgow.

KERKHAM said 1"+ and bottom feed.

McKENNA & CO were agents for **Chemische Technische Industries GMBH** and wanted a core 10-30mm dia and top feed but said their design incorporated a marble in the coil to indicate the end of the roll.

The ISM Co. had a coiling machine on its way from the US. The US PO said they had reduced the stamp perforations from 14 to 7 and done away with them altogether on the other sides of the sheets to make the sheets easier to slit. At first they wanted sideways delivery but had to be satisfied with top feed, 1000 stamps on ½" coils. They had 18 girls making 960 coils/day and with the new machines hoped to make 1000 with only 4 operators. They were granted a license to sell stamp coils at 2d each over the stamp cost.

SLATER, BATTY & Co. had not even invented their machine yet.

KLEENAN, agents for MICHELIUS wanted 1¼ cores, top feed, their machine cost £10.

In 1911 Harrisons were asked to quote for coils, to have heavy lead seals. When asked to replace these with paper seals and reduce their price they said paper seals were the same price.

The Merkhams Trading Co. had heard a claim by the manufacturer of a German machine that the PO were making coils for them and wrote an incensed letter asking why a British company was not given the same facilities. Of course, the claim turned out to be premature.

In the meantime the BEAM machine was £26-50 and they were now waiting coiling machinery from Belgium.

A machine for printing stamps in coils made by Gandenberger Machine Manufacturing Co of Dormstadt as used by the German PO was

investigated. At 22,000 marks it was dearer than Harrisons joining the coils by hand!

At this time an ad appears in the files for a "**Jones Quick Stamper**", which states 'if it's not available from local supplier just send \$3'. It illustrates a small nickel plated, palm held, banjo shaped machine. The thumb advances stamps (from a small coil presumably) and these were pressed onto the letter from the underside of the "neck" of the banjo.

The PO asked Harrisons to produce a number of dummy coils and sent these to the firms involved, asking for their comments and how many they would need.

ISM Co answered that they had machines in Liverpool, Port Sunlight, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Glasgow. BEAM had 37 machines, in Dublin, Stafford, Sheffield, Preston, York, Hull, Portsmouth, Bradford and Brighton. Michaelson now had 30 in Perth and 20 in Glasgow. Kleenan/Michelius had 50, in London, Liverpool, Bradford and York.

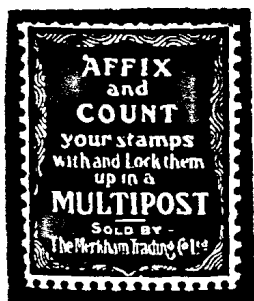
In addition the PO had enquiries for coils from the Home Supply Co., Chancery Lane; Carrs of Carlisle; Smiths Premier Typewriter Co, Queen Street, EC; Imperial Hotel, Cork; E Hulton & Co, Tudor Street, EC and Fleet Street, EC; publishers of The Daily Sketch etc; British Stamp & Ticket Automatic Delivery Co Ltd, Tothill Street, Westminster and Halsby & Co, Cannon Street, EC. This last illustrated a "Protectorgraph" on their letter heading, which could be a perforating device, but they do not say what a protectorgraph is, just unhelpfully, that they make them in many countries of the world.

The Michelius "Record" machine perfins stamps and they tried to get the PO interested in other machines of theirs, in use by the German PO. These were affixing stamps to bulk mail. The German PO preferred stamps to "Post Paid" impressions as they considered, quite rightly, that these looked like circulars and were thrown away unopened by the recipients. The British PO declined trials preferring "Paid" stamps applied by electric machines.

Hilton, a clerk in West District PO offered his invention to affix coils produced by Harrisons. The PO were used to inventors, they even had a printed leaflet pointing out where they stood.

Merkham were offering machines at £10-50 and were showing them to Labour Exchanges for stamping the new Insurance Cards.

Lastly, in the file was an 1918 letter from Multipost with a Multipost advert stamp affixed and this advert was presumably from this period. The PO were querying whether "the British Government has 125 machines" as claimed.



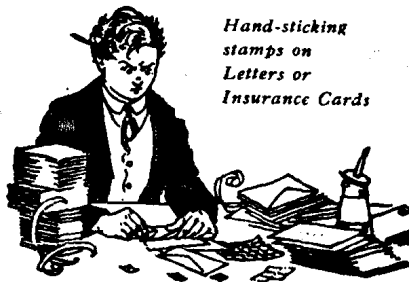
STAMPS INSURANCE CARDS, PARCELS, LETTERS, POST CARDS

YOU—WITH THE STAMP BOX

Why waste your time stamp-sticking when you might spend it much more profitably or enjoyably? Why have that daily race with the clock at the old sticky messy game? Why have people "helping themselves" and forgetting to tell you? Why break your heart at the "strip and lick" or "sponge and stick," only to be told you are short in your balance?

Why put up with all the fret and fume, hustle and blame, when with a punch of THE MULTIPOST you can stamp and record every stamp used, and "keep all other fingers out of the pie"?

Ask your employer to have THE MULTIPOST on a FREE FIVE DAYS' TRIAL as invited opposite. You'll show him how to save his money as well as your time. You'll be freer for better work—and you know what *that* means.



Hand-sticking stamps on Letters or Insurance Cards

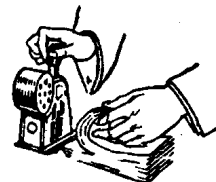
And YOU—Mr. Employer—who seek efficiency in your staff

The MULTIPOST stamps letters or cards, parcels or Insurance Cards and counts them—200 in a minute. A novice can use it. Saves a clerk.

It makes your stamp clerk *really* the stamp clerk. No one else can use it—or take the stamps. Removes all risk of shortage and suspicion.

It is small, simple, light, efficient, durable. Guaranteed absolutely, fair use or foul, for one year. It never leaks or jams, or mutilates the stamps. After several years it is still the only efficient stamp affixer on the market, and is used by over 30,000 prominent business houses. The British Government has 125.

It holds 500 stamps, and water to affix them securely. All values of stamps can be used. Your local post office is officially bound to supply, on demand (or within 3 days if not actually in stock), the right stamps for the MULTIPOST in rolls as follows—



Stamping Letters or Insurance Cards with MULTIPOST

| | | |
|-----------|---|---------|
| Postage | 1½d. "M" 500 | £3 2 7 |
| " | 1d. "F" 500 | £2 1 9 |
| " | ¾d. "H" 500 | £1 0 11 |
| Insurance | 7d. Health 480 "Delivery Lower End-First" | £14 0 0 |
| " | 6d. Health 480 ditto | £12 0 0 |
| " | Unemployment "Delivery Left Side First" 480 | £10 0 0 |

Will you try the MULTIPOST for 5 days, free. If not then convinced of its enormous saving, efficiency and security, simply return it to us. Please use or enclose this tear-off form, and at the same time order stamps, at your Post Office, to avoid delay. If for postage, specify the above letters "M," "F," or "H" (which are rolls specially made for the MULTIPOST), to prevent the possibility of being supplied with rolls which will not work in the MULTIPOST. Any Post Office can supply you, but may take three days for first order.

5 DAYS FREE TRIAL

THE MERKHAM TRADING CO., Ltd.,
3, 4 & 5, Bank Chambers, 329, High Holborn, W.C.1

Please send for 5 days' Free Trial.

X { Postal MULTIPOST
Insurance MULTIPOST
* (Cross out the one you do not want).

NAME and ADDRESS:—

If not then satisfied in 5 days we are free to return the MULTIPOST.

Local Agents—

THE MERKHAM TRADING CO., Ltd., 3, 4 & 5, Bank Chambers, 329, High Holborn, London, W.C.1.

SAVES WORK, WORRY, LABOUR, MONEY.

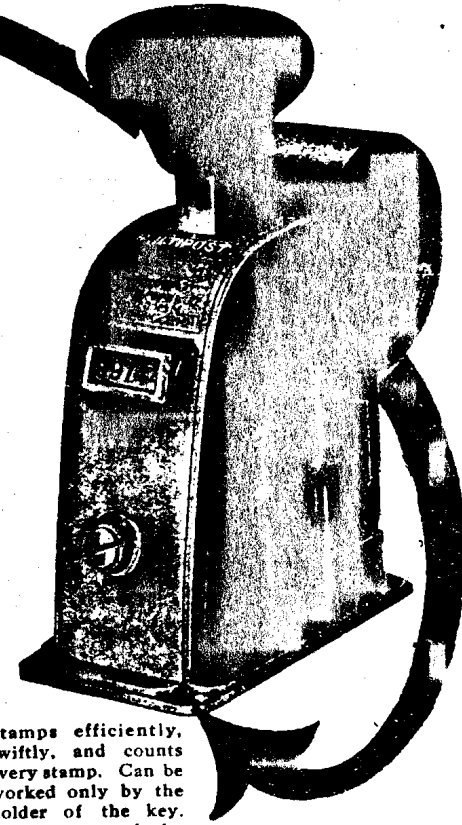
**This
is
Yours**

To reduce cost of stamping.

[P.T.O.]

If you want to
save money and
time on your firm's
postage account.

The MULTIPOST
3/4 actual size. Weight 1 1/2 lbs.



Stamps efficiently,
swiftly, and counts
every stamp. Can be
worked only by the
holder of the key.
Stamps safely
locked up inside