

PERFIN POSTAL STATIONERY PRODUCTION

Maurice Harp

With **Rosemary Smith's** current update on Postal Stationery perfined I was encouraged to inspect my meagre collection of two. One of these is a QV wrapper with ½d Green Type 2 with two additional ½d bantams. I thought that all three stamps were struck with R/F&Co – R1810.02M – used by Robinson Fleming & Co, merchants, London. This die is one of a few where the die configuration has been determined from misplaced and broken pins and is known to be 6 x 1. So I wondered how a 6 x 1 die could be used to perforate the wrapper itself. Closer examination of the wrapper perfin showed that the die in fact was not R1801.02 but a similar die – almost certainly single headed. **Roy Gault** has designated it as R1810.02a and it is mentioned elsewhere in the Bulletin.



This observation raised the whole question of how stationery was perforated by companies and/or Sloper. The stamp impression on all wrappers is set approximately three inches from the top of the sheet and so a conventional single die machine would not be able to reach the stamp impression from the top. Looking again at my wrapper I noted that the strike of the perfin is at an angle and I would guess that the machine used had the perfin die set at 90 degrees to normal and that the strike was made from the side of the wrapper.

It is somewhat surprising that companies would have gone to the additional expense of purchasing another perfin machine simply to handle postal stationery, which would have been of much smaller use. However it is clear that in most cases the machine that they had purchased for their stamps would simply not work for stationery. Postcards and wrappers could be perfined from the side. Registered envelopes could be perfined on their flaps but envelopes would present a greater challenge.

Colin Baker, Secretary of the Postal Stationery Society who is currently working on an update of the Huggins catalogue writes:-

“Paper for STO envelopes had to be submitted to the stamping office in flat sheets, with an indication of where the stamps were to be impressed. Companies would either have the sheets pre-printed before stamping, or would do so afterwards. In either case they had to tell the stamping office where to strike the stamps. Once the paper was stamped it would then be made up into envelopes, probably by the same firm that did the initial printing.

Similarly I believe that Post Office issue envelopes could be bought in flat sheets so that firms could print their own details on them more easily.

I believe the perforating machines used to stamp firms initials through stationery were generally quite small, probably capable of punching only one item at a time, especially if the company only used a relatively small number of stationery items. This would have been made it more difficult to perforate whole sheets before envelopes were folded and glued. However a firm like the Army and Navy stores, using a large number of envelopes could have had a perforating plate which would have stamped the whole sheet at once i.e. before the envelopes were completed. Alternatively they could have had a machine with a long reach but I think this is unlikely.”

Many questions still need to be answered - Rosemary's work opens up a whole new area for research. Did Sloper provide perfined stationery or were they just produced from private machines? If Sloper did provide the service did he use whole unfolded sheets? Did companies always have separate machines for stationery or did they sometimes try to use the machine that they used for stamps?