

G. B. KENT & SONS – BRUSH MAKERS

Maurice Harp

In September 1873 Eden Fisher applied to the Post Office to perforate the full name SUTTON on stamps for his customer. The Post Office turned the application down but Fisher was not to be put off and told the Post Office that Sloper was using full names, so why shouldn't he. The Post Office carried out a survey of mail passing through the E.C. District Office and found to their surprise that indeed a number of companies such as HUTH and GLYN were indeed using full name perfins. The offending firms were told to desist and Sloper was given a warning but as every perfin collector knows the warnings mainly fell on deaf ears. One of the full name users of the time who may have been warned was G. B. Kent & Sons – brush makers to Royalty.



G. B. Kent & Sons was founded by William Kent of Barnard Castle in 1777 in the reign of George III. In 1807 William Kent's eldest son (also William) took over control of the company. In 1836 William's younger brother John James took over and the company became for a while John James Kent & Sons. Under

John James the company made King William IV's toothbrushes and to this day the company holds the Royal Warrant for brushes. The company went through various partnerships to become G. B. Kent & Co in 1854. This was changed to G. B. Kent & Sons in 1880 and then became a public limited company in 1900.

Until the beginning of the last century Kent made brushes in London, but for the last eighty-five years or so they have used a factory at Apsley near Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire. Much of the manufacturing, though, is still carried on by hand using methods which are little changed from 1777.



George Barton Kent

William Kent exhibited no false modesty in promoting his wares as seen in this Times advert. *'These brushes, which are entirely different to any hitherto offered to the public, are so decidedly superior in principle as to convince at first sight the most incredulous. By their peculiar arrangement they at one action remove the dirt or dandruff and polish the surface, at the same time leaving the most beautiful gloss on the coat that can be imagined.'*

George Barton Kent, from whom the company takes its name, held the Royal Warrant and ran the business from 1854 to 1900, presiding over a massive expansion in the range of products and the number sold. By the end of the century Kent were making so many bone-handled toothbrushes that were using the leg bones of 600 bullocks a week.

G. B. Kent & Sons are associated with the use of five perfin dies. Four of these are confirmed as used by Kent but K0700.05 is still to be confirmed. Looking at the 1d plates reported Die K0700.04 is almost certainly a Sloper die, however no dated copies of this die have yet been reported. As can be seen from the dates of use Kent & Sons continuously used perfins until around 1940 when it seems their use apparently stopped – maybe their machine was lost during one of the seventeen air raids on the factory during the war.

