Part 2: ‘Peripheral’ Postal Mechanisation

This half of the display covers various aspects of postal mechanisation that have generally taken place outside the sorting offices. The topics include the following sections:

Section 1: The early cancelling machines

Section 2: Royal Mail vehicles

Section 3: Postcode publicity

Section 4: Postal mechanisation on British stamps

Section 5: Postal mechanisation trials

Section 6: Coding marks

Section 1: The Early Cancelling Machines

This section covers some of the key developments associated with various machines that were invented for the purpose of cancelling stamps in the early years, including:

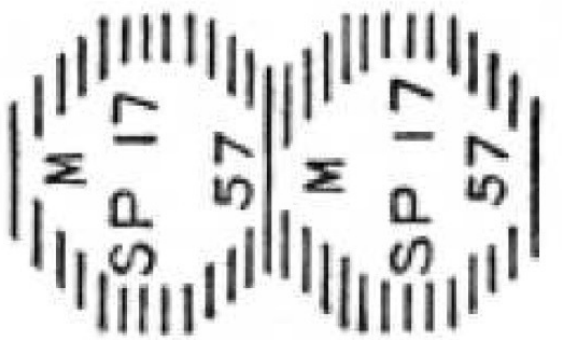
Year	Event
1857	The Pearson Hill stamp cancelling machine
1858	The Pearson Hill Duplex Parallel obliterator
1868	The first appearance of perfins
1870	The Sloper perforating machine
1901	The Columbia stamp cancelling machine
1905	The Krag stamp cancelling machine
1911	The Universal stamp cancelling machine
1912	The Wilkinson machine
1914	The Hey-Dolphin stamp cancelling machine
1922	The first appearance of meter franking machines

1857 - The Pearson Hill Machine

Postal mechanisation really all began back in 1857 with the experimental Pearson Hill machine.

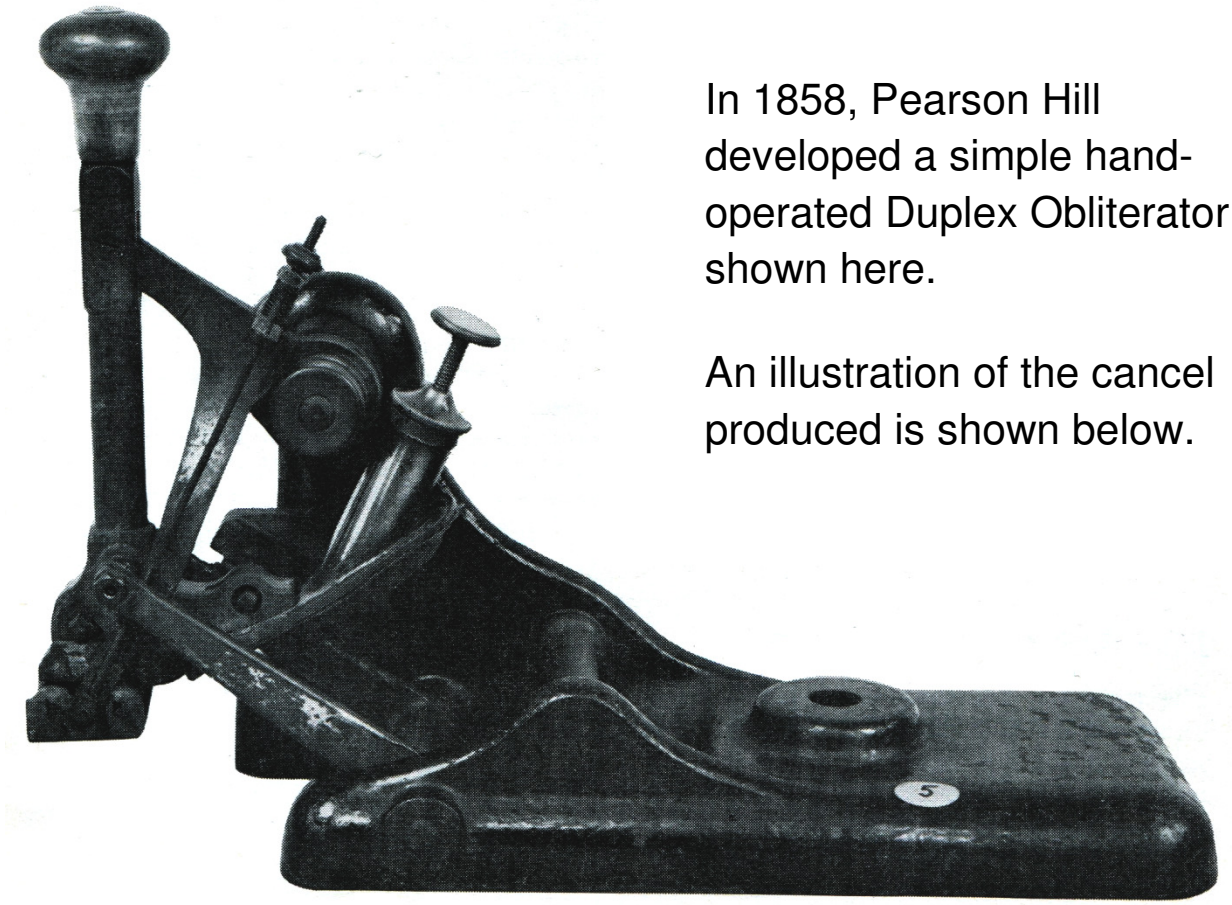
The machine itself was treadle-operated and could postmark approximately 100 letters per minute. This was considerably slower than an experienced postal clerk who could hand-stamp mail at about 200 strikes/minute, albeit the machine's durability and stamina always surpassed that of a clerk.

In both cases the mail had to be 'faced', i.e. arranged and sorted so that the front side was always facing the clerk for feeding into the machine for proper postmarking.



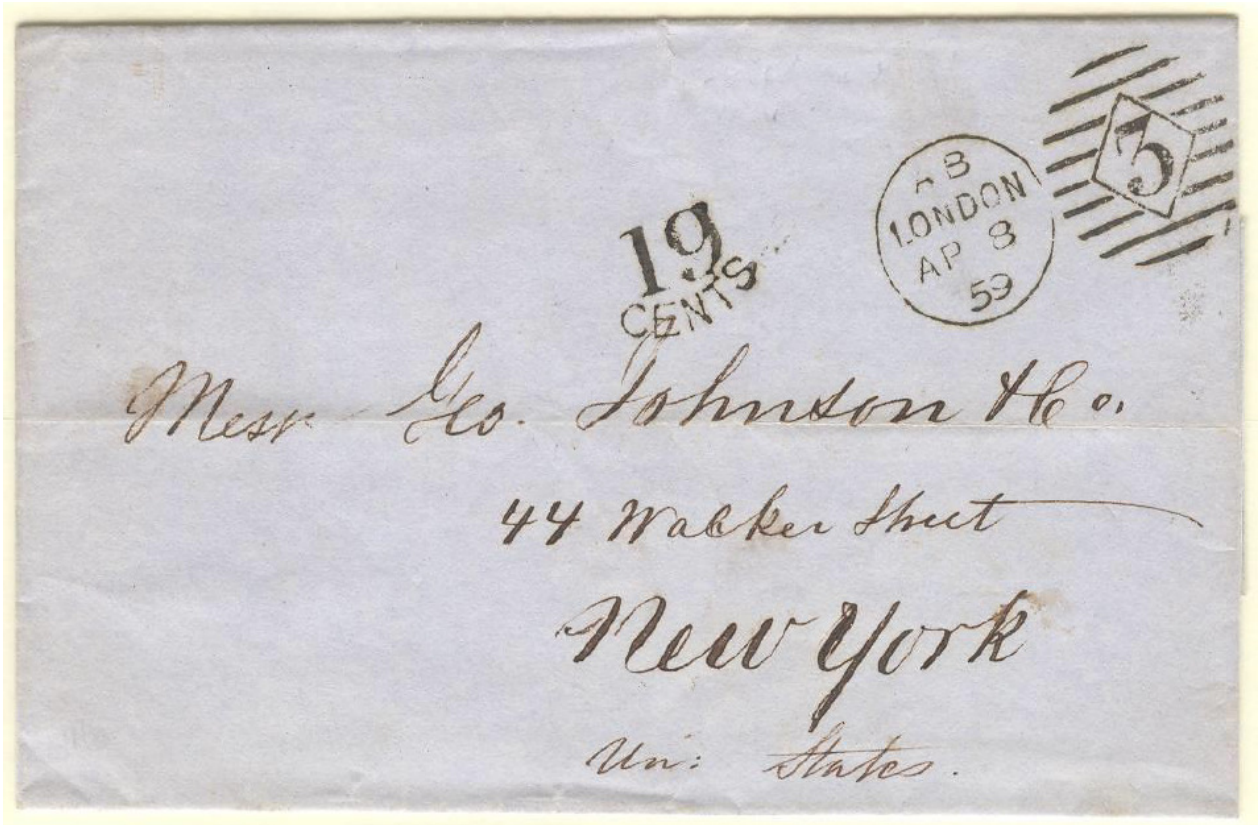
Demonstration of Hill's machine to the postal authorities took place on 17 September 1857. The die used for this demonstration was most probably made of wood. Three surviving covers from the demonstration are recorded.

1858 – Pearson Hill Duplex Parallel Obliterator



In 1858, Pearson Hill developed a simple hand-operated Duplex Obliterator, shown here.

An illustration of the cancel produced is shown below.



1868 - Perfins

Perfins are stamps where the central portion has been perforated with a number of small holes in a distinct pattern. These are applied by private businesses and governmental agencies to discourage theft and misuse and usually take the form of initials, or numerals to identify the user. .

The invention of the machine that produced the holes was the Britain Joseph Sloper who, after much effort, persuaded the Post Office to allow the perforation of British postage stamps.

The name ‘perfin’ is a condensed form of PERForated INitials. Official authorisation for use of perfins was given on 13th March 1868.

The earliest known cancellation on a perfin is November 1868, with the earliest cover being 5th January 1869.

The penny red stamp here bears the perfin “GWR” (Great Western Railway) and is dated 20 July 1869.

To date, 24,385 different perfin designs have been catalogued. They are rarely seen nowadays.

1870 – The Sloper Perforating Machine

With the introduction of the postal stationery card in October 1870, the General Post Office sought a device for effective cancelling of such cards in quantity. Joseph Sloper produced an experimental perforating machine for this purpose, based on a similar machine that had been used to apply perfins to postage stamps. The Sloper machine was initially tested in London and subsequently in Liverpool, Manchester, Edinburgh and Bradford. There were four types of cancel - the first being in the form of an arrow and used in London and Liverpool between 1870 and 1875.

The card is dated 9 June 1873, Liverpool on reverse.

The following table lists the different types of cancellation used during the five-year experiment:

Cancellation Type	Location	Dates of use
Arrow Perforations	London & Liverpool	Nov 1870 – Jan 1875
Clip	Manchester	Nov 1870 – Jan 1875
Single hole punch	Birmingham, Bradford, Edinburgh & Liverpool	Oct 1870 – Jan 1876
Orb and Cross perf.	London	Nov 70 – Feb 1872

Source: The Perfin Society

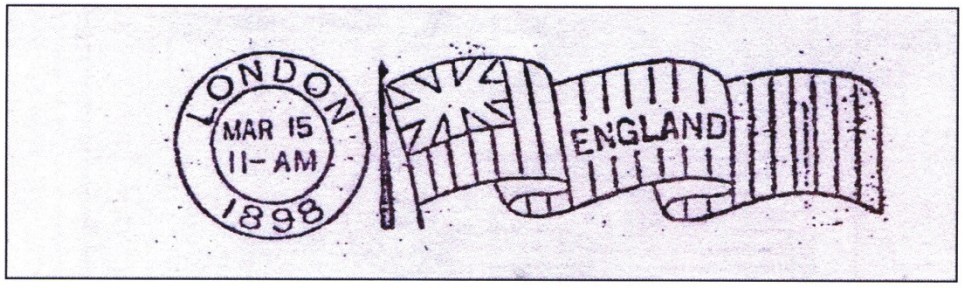
1884 The Höster Machine

In 1882/3 trials of German machines developed by Loffelhardt and Haller were conducted by the British Post Office. In 1884, Mr Höster produced a machine based on these machines. The card below has both the initial (smaller) version of the cancel and the later (larger) version of 1885.

Postcard with both versions of the Höster machine cancel, dated 12 Aug 1886

1898 The Empire Machine

In 1898, Martin Ethridge formed the Empire Cancelling Machine Company and the machines were trialled in London and they produced these attractive 'flag' cancels:



Source: Handbook of Postal Mechanisation

Experimental Cancelling Machines

The following is a list of the various experimental cancelling machines that were evaluated by the British Post Office in the second half of the 19th century:

1857 Person Hill First Version

1858 Pearson Hill Second Version

1858 Charles Rideout

1858 Pearson Hill Parallel Motion

1868 Pearson Hill Pivot

1868 Azemar

1871 Sloper Perforating Machine

1877 Vaile

1882 Hoster (Löffelhardt/Haller)

1884 Hoster First Version

1885 Hoster Second Version

1885 Ethridge machine

1890 Malin

1893 International First Trial

1896 Imperial

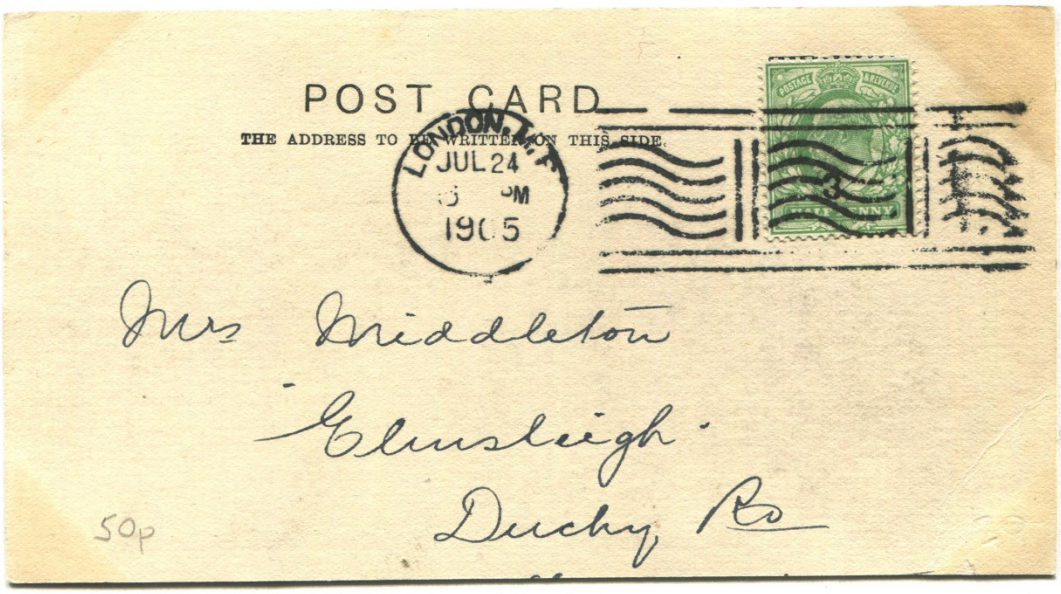
1897 Bickerdike

1897 Boston

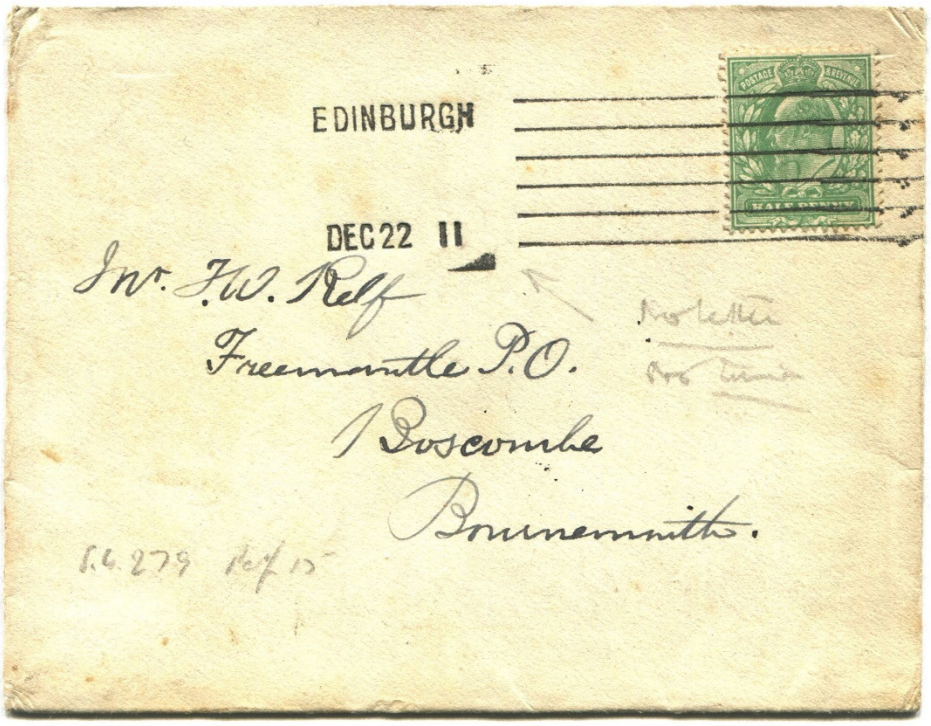
1898 Empire

1901 – The Columbia Machine

Following successful trials in 1901 and 1902, 12 single-impression postmarking machines were purchased from the Columbia Postal Supply Company of New York. A wide variety of postmarks were applied by this machine and two examples are shown below:



1905 – Columbia machine



1911 – Columbia machine

Source: Jerry H. Miller