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Hurlin machine stored in the British Postal Museum & Archive.
The machine was used to perforate stamps with perfin die HM/SO – H5200.01.

THE H.M.S.O. STAMP PERFORATING MACHINE

Maurice Harp

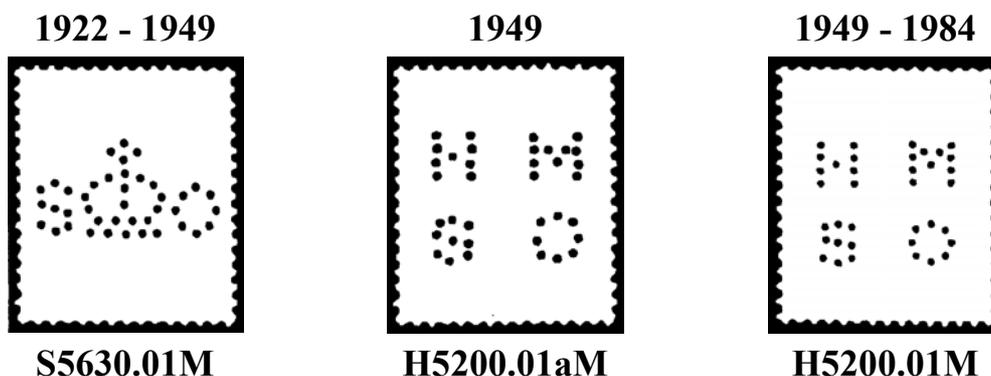
In 1983 former Society member **Betty Lucas** learnt from a contact in the H. M. Stationery Office that an old perforating machine, formerly used by the Stationery Office, was in a store in London^[1]. It was a treadle operated machine and apparently bore a metal plate identifying it as Sloper Machine No. 68939. Sloper's records showed that this machine was in fact originally manufactured by Hurlin & Sons and that it had been overhauled and modified in late 1949 by Sloper, when a new perforating head, containing 12 dies, was supplied. **Betty Lucas** stated that stamps perforated in early 1949 show the original Hurlin perfin design (H5200.01aM), whilst those perforated later in 1949, and from that date onwards, show the new Sloper Die (H5200.01M). The short period of use of the Hurlin die is the reason that so few examples of H5200.01aM exist.



A little later in 1983 the Government office contacted **Tony Edwards** to alert him to the fact that the machine having been found in a storehouse was about to be scrapped^[2]. It was discovered just in time, as due to a reorganisation in H.M.S.O. the store had been closed and the machine was to be sent away for scrap. **Tony Edwards** stepped in and managed to save the machine. The machine was in full working

order and some strikes were made at the time from the machine using blank paper.

The Hurlin machine had originally been made c1922 to perforate stamps with the S Crown O design – S5630.01M. However in 1949 it was realised the use of the crown fell foul of postal regulations and that the die needed to be replaced, as only initials were permitted^[3].



Later **Tony Edwards** passed the machine to the British Postal Museum and the photos in this article were taken by Glenn Morgan (non-member) at the Museum's store at Debden and are reproduced here with his permission. For more photos taken by Glenn of post office related material at the Debden store take a look at his flickr page at www.flickr.com/photos/glennmorganuk .

Surprisingly little is known about E. Hurlin & Son. Ebenezer Hurlin was born in 1841 and was originally a plumber and brass finisher. At the age of 41 he apparently saw an opportunity to start a business and in the 1892 London Trade Directory we find for the first time, Ebenezer Hurlin - manufacturer of perforating, numerical printing & rulers for pen making machines based at 36 Leather Lane, London EC. In 1897 the company had moved to 7 Portpool Road, EC and is listed as E. Hurlin & Son – presumably run by his son John. By 1909 the company had moved to 15 Bowling Green Lane, EC and they had added bookbinder's engineers to the list of trades carried out. All three of these addresses are within walking distance of each other. The company then stayed at Bowling Green Lane until they seem to have gone out of business in 1956. If John Hurlin had still been running the company he would have been 79 by this stage and maybe there was no one to take of the business and it came to a natural end.

So Hurlin & Son was still in business when the HMSO decided to replace the die heads on the machine to comply with postal regulation. If we take Betty Lucas's report that the machine was fitted with die H5200.01a by Hurlin as correct, it would seem that the Government originally went to Hurlin for the die to be changed and that the modification done by Hurlin was unsuccessful. So the Government then approached Sloper for a second attempt at the modification. It is probable that Hurlin's modification had resulted in jamming of the machine. It was reported by Tony Edwards Sloper modified the design so that the length of the pins forming each letter was slightly different. This meant that as the sheets were perforated, only the pins forming one letter penetrate the stamps at a time. In this way a number of sheets could be perforated without the effort of forcing all the pins through the paper at the same time or the pins jamming. So Sloper completed the work and took the opportunity to screw a J. Sloper plaque on the front of the machine. Hopefully one day the machine will be proudly on display at the new British Postal Museum, if it ever comes to pass.



Many thanks to **Roy Gault** and **John Mathews** for carrying out biographical and directory research into the company that helped in the preparation of this article.

References

- [1] Perfin Society Bulletin 206 / 3-5 - August 1983 – “The Enigma of the Stationery Office Perfin Solved” by Betty Lucas
- [2] Perfin Society Bulletin 206 / 9 - August 1983 – “The HM/SO Perforating Machine” by Tony Edwards
- [3] Security Endorsement & Perfin Society Newsletter 75 “How S/Crown/O Became HM/SO” by John Nelson