

THE FIRM OF JOHN DICKINSON, PAPER MAKER

Introduction

Until the end of the eighteenth century paper was made by hand in individual sheets. Experiments in France from 1797 eventually produced a patent for a paper-making machine. This was unsuccessful, but the drawings were brought to England in 1801 and finance was raised to build the first successful machine at Frogmore in Hertfordshire in 1803. John Dickinson was at that time working in London as a stationer, among other contracts supplying paper to the East India Company. He saw the potential for machine-made paper, and started making his own experiments for which he was granted a number of patents. In 1809 he went into partnership with George Longman and bought his first mill. The business proved highly successful, expanding rapidly largely due to Dickinson's skills both as an entrepreneur and an engineer. He actively looked for new markets, and when Rowland Hill made his proposals to reform the postal service Dickinson was there to promote his own products. His silk-thread paper was used among other things for Britain's early postal stationery.

John Dickinson and the company he founded became one of the biggest makers of machine-made paper in England. The company continued to flourish long after his death, expanding into paper products, particularly stationery. In the twentieth century Dickinson products included household names. This exhibit is a very brief look at the history of the company in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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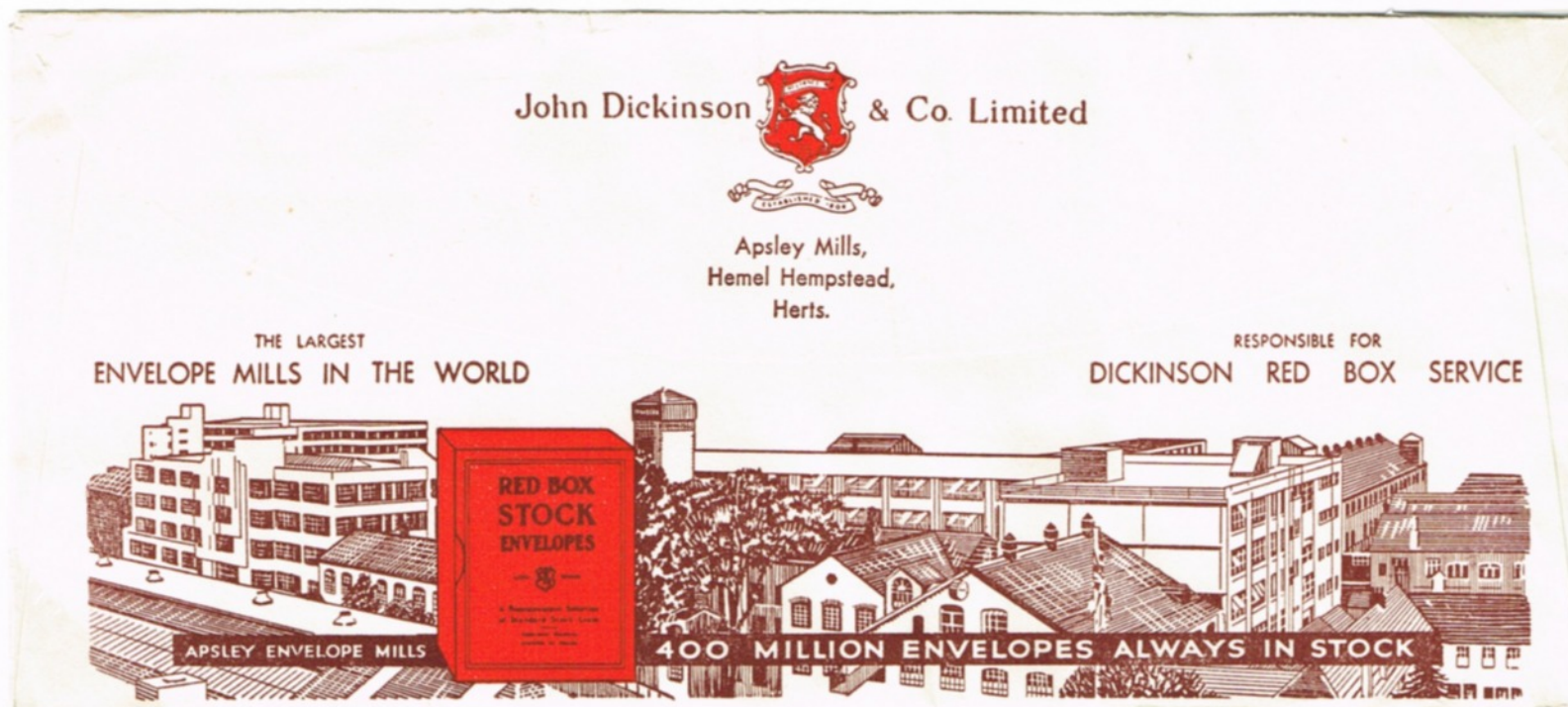
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John Dickinson

Digital image taken from a photograph of 1860
Source: Wikimedia Commons



1937 cover (reverse) with Dickinson meter, showing its Envelope Department

The mills

Dickinson started his business by buying a number of working paper mills in and around Hemel Hempstead. It was an area already known for its hand production of paper, as well as being the location of the world's first paper making machine at Frogmore, where the Fourdriner Brothers had bought the rights to the French invention.



Apsley Mill

This was his first mill, purchased in 1809. It was already making handmade paper for which the stationer Dickinson had been a customer. In 1815 it was the first of his mills to be converted to steam power.

Batchworth Mill

His second purchase was Batchworth Mill, 11 miles to the north. It was used for the production of half-stuff (processed rag ready for pulp production).



Nash Mill

This was purchased in 1811. Both Nash and Apsley Mills relied on Batchworth for their supply of processed rags.

The mills

The success of the business led to further acquisitions.

John Dickinson & Co. Ltd.
Home Park Mills,
Kings Langley,
Herts.



Messrs. The Patent Borax Co., Ltd.,
Ladywood,
Birmingham.

Back flap

Home Park Mill

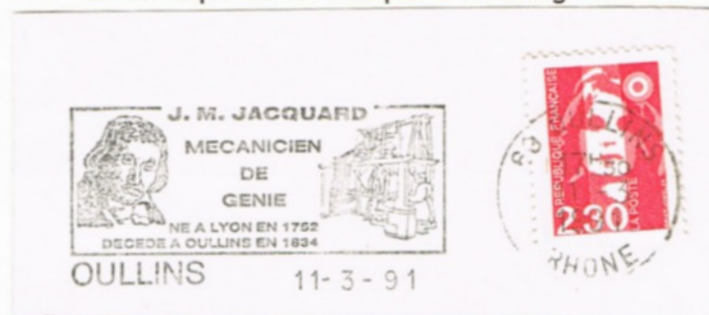
Dickinson had this mill built in 1825, going into production a year later with two machines.

King's Langley to Birmingham

05 November 1929

J D perfin

In the early days one of the machines specialised in producing the special cards required for Jacquard weaving.



Croxley Mill

In 1829 Dickinson purchased Croxley Mill, five miles by canal from Home Park. A private Act of Parliament had to be obtained to permit the purchase and it opened a year later.



Photo. F. Downer & Son, Watford.

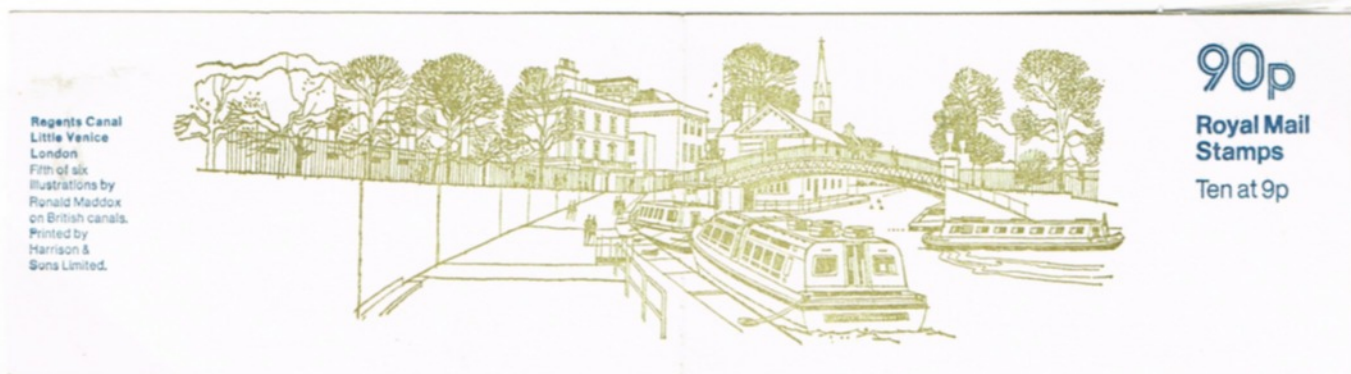
RAG SORTING HOUSE, CROXLEY
PAPER MILLS.

Croxley Mills c.1910.

From the magazine *Britain at Work*.

Transport

Good transport was essential for receiving the raw materials (rags were imported from the Continent as well as bought in the UK) as well as delivering the end product. The Grand Junction Canal ran past the mills and provided a transport route to London for its products. Dickinson eventually owned his own fleet of barges. From 1837 the London & Birmingham Railway (which in 1846 became the London & North Western Railway) ran beside the canal and Dickinson used both rail and barge.



Regents Canal
Little Venice
London
Fifth of six
illustrations by
Ronald Maddox
on British canals.
Printed by
Harrison &
Sons Limited.

90p

Royal Mail
Stamps

Ten at 9p



The Regent's Canal was built to provide a junction with the Grand Junction Canal at Little Venice, extending transport right through London.

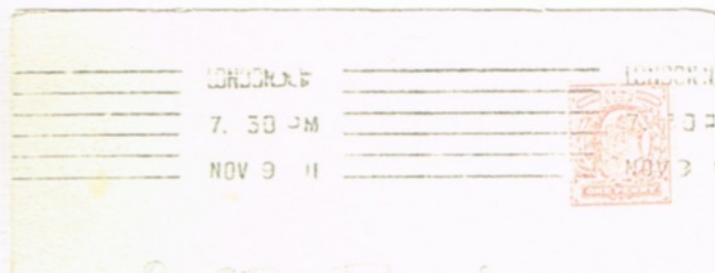


Addressed to Grand Junction Canal Office, Westminster
1798 London Penny Post, with red TIME marking and oval
unpaid Penny Post.

London & North Western Railway.

THE FOLLOWING HOTELS ARE UNDER THE COMPANY'S MANAGEMENT.

HOTELS.	TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS.	TELEPHONE NUMBER.
ON	EUSTON HOTEL	BESTOTEL, LONDON
INGHAM	QUEENS HOTEL	BESTOTEL, BIRMINGHAM
RPOOL	NORTH WESTERN HOTEL	BESTOTEL, LIVERPOOL
CHLEY	STATION HOTEL	BESTOTEL, BLETCHLEY
WE	CREWE ARMS HOTEL	BESTOTEL, CREWE
HEAD	STATION HOTEL	BESTOTEL, HOLYHEAD
ENORE	GREENORE HOTEL	BESTOTEL, GREENORE
		BESTOTEL, PRESTON
		NORTH 3000.
		CENTRAL 5531.
		ROYAL 2960.
		CREWE 21.
		HOLYHEAD P.O. 24.
		PRESTON 188.



Letter from the London & North
Western Railway Company 1911.

Silk thread paper

While extending his production Dickinson also experimented with different types of paper. In 1829 he patented his 'silk thread' paper, a security paper almost impossible to forge, which he first used in that year for Exchequer Bonds. When Rowland Hill published his pamphlet *Post Office Reform* in 1837 Dickinson immediately saw a commercial opportunity. He prepared essays of prepaid postal stationery and had them printed by Charles Whiting. He was called to give evidence to the 1838 Post Office Commission of Enquiry set up to investigate Hill's proposals, and in 1839 he submitted them to the Treasury competition.

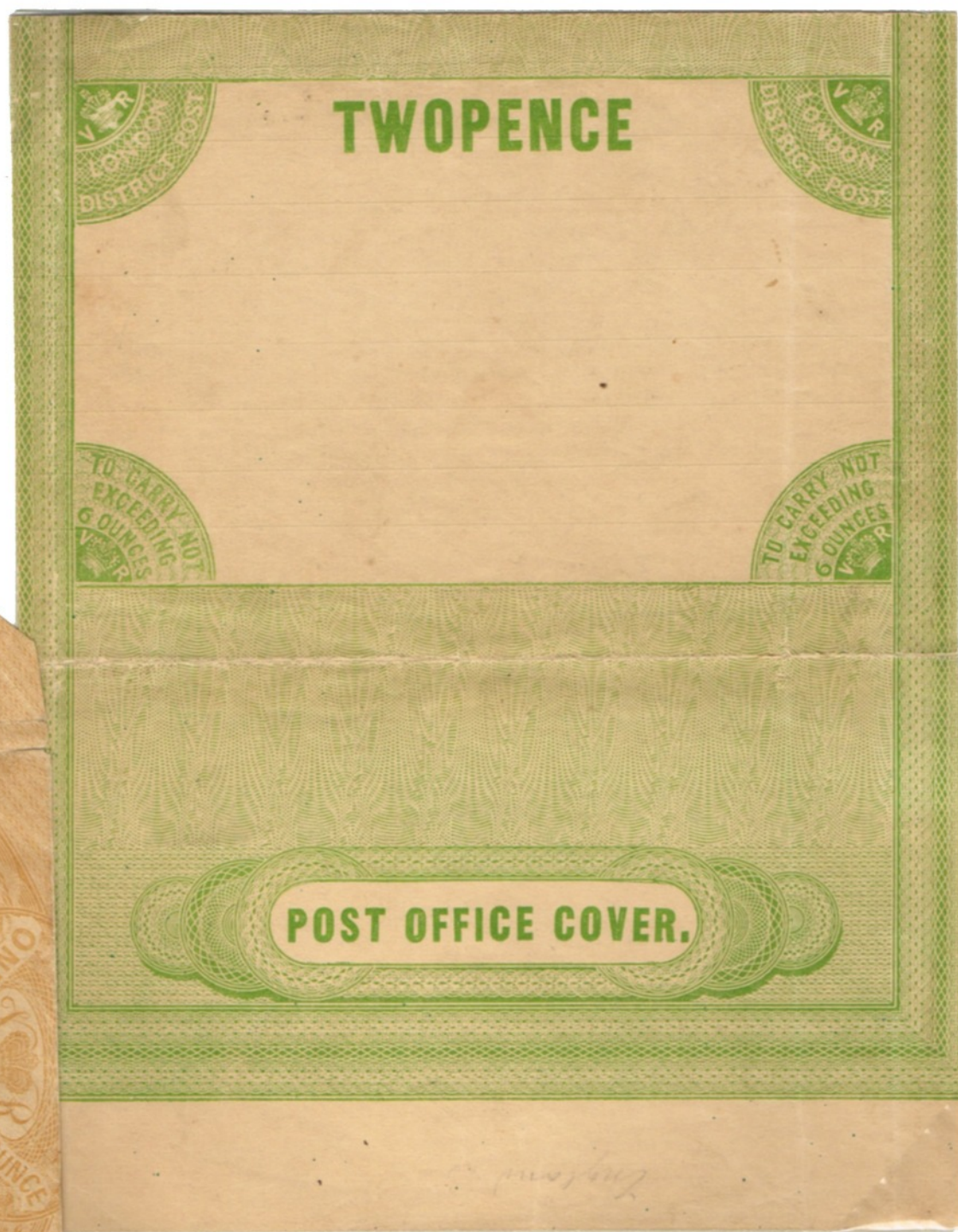
Post Office reform

NB: The term 'silk-thread' was used as Dickinson's Patent no. 5754 refers to "cotton, flaxen or silken thread". However, scientific analysis by Christopher Earland in 1990 proved that they are actually cotton threads.



The proposals for prepayment of the one penny rate, for up to 1 oz within the London District Post, was as a letter-sheet and an envelope.

Essay of a one penny envelope. The threads run diagonally and are grouped in pairs.



Essay of a two pence letter sheet, to be used for prepayment up to 6 oz within the London District Post. It has ten blue threads, approximately 10 mm apart, running horizontally across the middle (address) panel.

The 2d was only made as a letter-sheet.

Silk thread paper

The 1840 postal reform resulted in the introduction of 'adhesive labels' (i.e. stamps) and prepaid covers. Letter-sheets and envelopes were each printed to value of 1d for letters up to half ounce and 2d for letters up to 1 ounce. They were designed by William Mulready, engraved by John Thompson and printed by William Clowes on John Dickinson silk-thread paper. Dickinson had spent three months improving his manufacturing process and in 1839 filed a patent in which the machine produced one blue thread between two red ones. The paper was chosen by the Treasury because they feared loss of income had forgeries been made. The Mulready paper was made on two machines at Nash Mill supervised by three excisemen.

The Mulreadys

Rowland Hill, postal reformer, who created the uniform postage system and the prepayment of mail through stamps and special stationery. Designed by The Four Hundred. Printed by Harrison & Sons Limited. 4 of 4.

UNIFORM
Penny Postage

THE PETITION

HOUSE OF COMMONS

1839

WILLIAM MULREADY

Rowland Hill

Rowland Hill

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Rowland Hill

Rowland Hill

£2

Royal Mail
Stamps

Eight at 25p

ORDER

POSTAGE & SUBSCRIPTIONS

POSTAGE & SUBSCRIPTIONS

POSTAGE & SUBSCRIPTIONS

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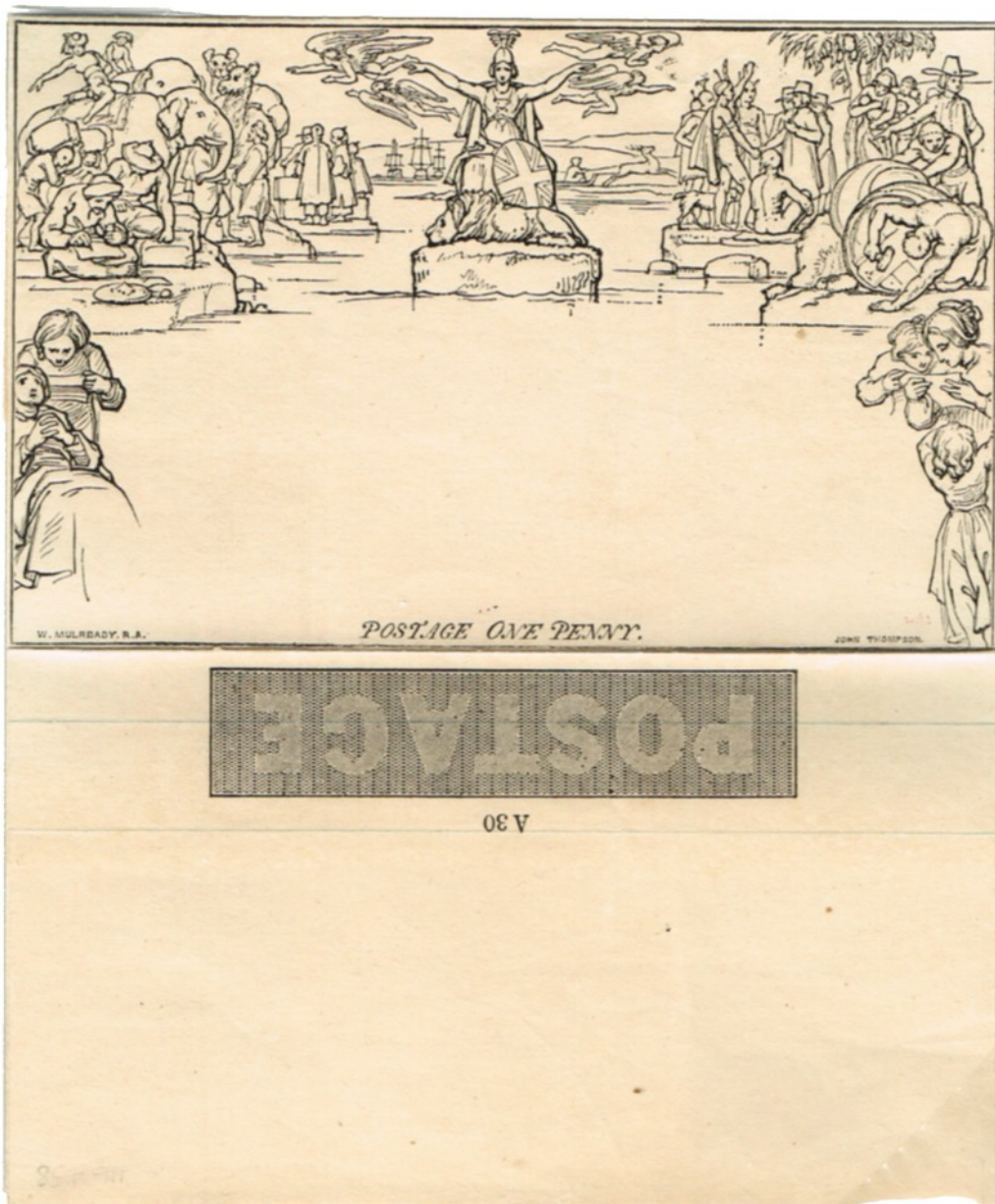
POSTAGE & SUBSCRIPTIONS

POSTAGE & SUBSCRIPTIONS

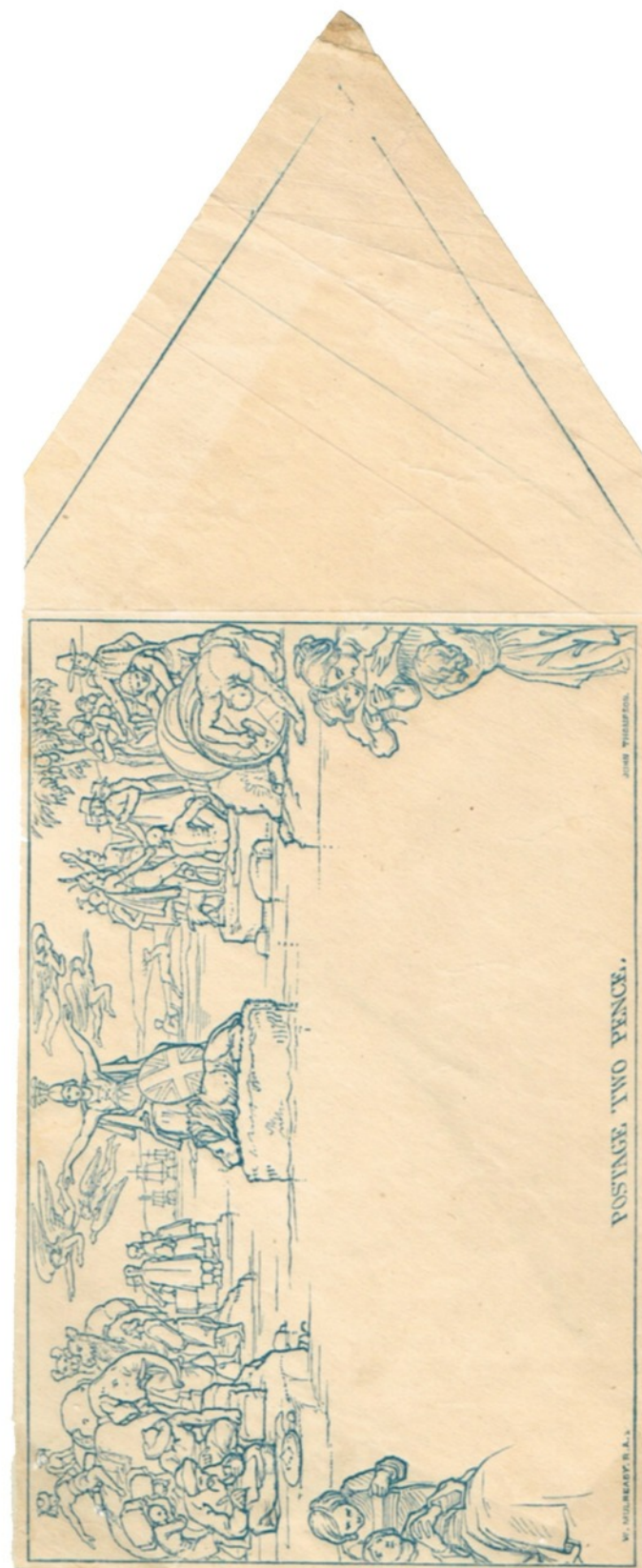


William Mulready

Mulready envelope on 1995 GB booklet commemorating the Uniform Penny Post.



Mulready one penny letter-sheet, stereo A30 with three silk threads at the top and two at the bottom fold.



Mulready two pence envelope, stereo a203 with three silk threads diagonally across top flap.

Silk thread paper

Following public ridicule the Mulreadys were withdrawn from sale. They were replaced by embossed postal stationery printed on Dickinson special paper, this time with two threads rather than three. Envelopes were introduced in 1841 and letter-sheets in 1844. They all remained in use until 1857.

Postal stationery and stamps



January 1841 envelope. Small size.
Groups of threads spaced 115 mm apart
Threads on right hand flap



April 1841 envelope. Largest size.
Groups of threads spaced 153 mm apart
Threads above stamp



1844 letter-sheet
Groups of threads parallel to top edge of sheet
12 June 1844
London to Manchester with London numeral cancel 1
and Manchester receipt



In 1847 silk-thread paper was used for Britain's only issue of embossed stamps. William Wyon submitted a rough design which included lines ruled across them to indicate the threads.
1 shilling green, with two vertical blue threads approx 5 mm apart



These were Britain's only issues using silk-thread, but Dickinson granted the Bavarian Paper Mill at Pasing a licence to manufacture this paper for the Switzerland 1854 issue.

Involvement in the community

The area around Apsley would have remained as very small villages had the paper mills not been located there. Croxley Green grew from a small village to an industrial community when the firm build fifty new cottages to house their workers in 1889. Nash Mills School, built by John Dickinson in 1847, still operates as a primary school. The company organised sports clubs and annual outings for its workers.

The Village Fete

In 1905 Dickinson's organised a village fete at Apsley to raise funds for the West Herts Infirmary. The highlight of the event was a balloon ascent by Captain Fleet, who then parachuted into the Salmon Meadow, adjacent to the Dickinson Works.



Company Brass Band

Badge of the John Dickinson Band, founded in 1894. (Original in the exhibitor's collection).



World War I

Peace Medal following World War 1, issued in 1919. Inscription reads "Presented by John Dickinson & Company Ltd. For work well done".



St. Mary's Church, Apsley

In 1871 St. Mary's Church was built, paid for by Charles Longman, senior partner in the Dickinson business, Sir John Evans, partner in Dickinson, and John Dickinson Jnr.

Stationery

John Dickinson retired in 1858. In 1886 the family-owned firm became a limited company, John Dickinson & Co. and saw its future in specialised stationery.

THE LATE JOHN DICKINSON AND THE PAPER MANUFACTURE.

We of the present day, with our newspapers issued daily by the hundred thousand, can form but a faint idea of what was the state of the paper manufacture, now so important a branch of industry in this country, even at so late a period as the commencement of the present century. Instead of paper being reeled off in webs many feet in width, and at the rate sometimes of upwards of a mile in the hour in length, each sheet had at that time to be made separately on a mould by hand, and had then to be subjected to various subsequent processes before it was in a state fit for use. To obtain a uniform and continuous supply for any purpose was almost a matter of impossibility, and the necessity of applying machinery to this manufacture was beginning to be felt, while the success which had attended its introduction into the spinning and weaving industries gave encouragement of success. Yet the whole change from a system of manufacture almost mediæval in its rudeness was comprised within the lifetime, and was in great measure effected by the exertions and ingenuity, of the gentleman whose name we have placed at the head of this paragraph, and who was buried, on Monday last, at Kensal-green. John Dickinson, eldest son of Captain James Dickinson, R.N., was born on March 29, 1782, and had, therefore, nearly completed his eighty-seventh year at the time of his decease. His father, of a north country family, was himself the son of a naval captain, and his mother came of an old French family, the Cossés, of Brissac, though her immediate ancestors had been driven by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes to settle in this country. It is probable that, as has been the case in many other instances, it was to this infusion of French blood that much of the inventive faculty to which Mr. Dickinson owed his subsequent success was due. The intimacy subsisting between Captain Dickinson's family and Mr. Andrew Strahan, at that time the King's printer, influenced his future career as connected with the supply and manufacture of paper. On the expiration of his indentures, he commenced business in Walbrook, and shortly after joined Mr. George Longman, brother of the late Mr. Longman, of Paternoster-row, and some time member for Maidstone, and carried on business with him, and subsequently with his nephew, in the premises in the Old Bailey, so long associated with the name of Dickinson and Co. It was not, however, until the year 1806 that the first patent "for manufacturing paper of an indefinite length" was taken out by Mr. Henry Fourdrinier; and this was soon followed by Mr. Dickinson's patent of June, 30, 1807, for machinery for cutting and planing paper thus made. Fourdrinier's patent for the paper-machine which still bears his name was taken out in the same year; and it was about this time that Mr. Dickinson commenced his career as a paper manufacturer by the purchase of Apsley Mill, near Hemel Hempstead, to which in the course of time four other mills in Hertfordshire were added, two of them constructed and the water-power for them created under his own superintendence. It was in 1807, before the commencement of the Peninsular campaigns, that he invented a new cannon-cartridge-paper, made by mixing together linen and woollen rags in certain proportions, so that after the explosion it was prevented from retaining sparks of fire. In 1809 he patented machinery for the manufacture of paper by means of an ingeniously-constructed cylinder of brass, covered with wire gauze and connected with an air-pump—a form of machine which still remains in use. This was followed by other patents for the manufacture of finely-faced copper-plate paper by a sort of veneering process, and for a machine to cut cards, both of which were successful inventions, and the former especially tended much to increase his reputation. In 1829 he invented the process of introducing coloured threads into the body of paper at the instant of its manufacture, which was again improved on in 1839. This preservative against forgery will have been noticed by holders of Exchequer bills, and many of us will remember it in the stamped envelopes which were issued by Government after the adoption of the penny-postage system, in the introduction of which Mr. Dickinson had taken great interest. In 1832 we find him again patenting a knoter or strainer for cleaning pulp from impurities; and, two years later, applying magnets for the removal of any portions of iron that may happen to be in the pulp, and thus preventing ironmould in the paper. Besides these, he took out other patents for improvements, more or less important, in the manufacture of paper, almost up to the period of his finally retiring from business, in 1857. Such is a brief outline of the principal inventions of Mr. Dickinson in connection with the manufacture, of which he must be regarded as one of the founders, and of which he was for so many years the recognised chief. But his energies were not confined to manufacturing and mechanical details; his friendship with the principal publishers of London and Edinburgh was intimate and lasting, and brought him in contact with most of the distinguished authors of his day. He was a member of many of the learned societies, and was in 1845 elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, to which he communicated, in 1851, some observations on the supply of water from the chalk stratum in the neighbourhood of London, containing much valuable information as to the percolation of water through chalk. In

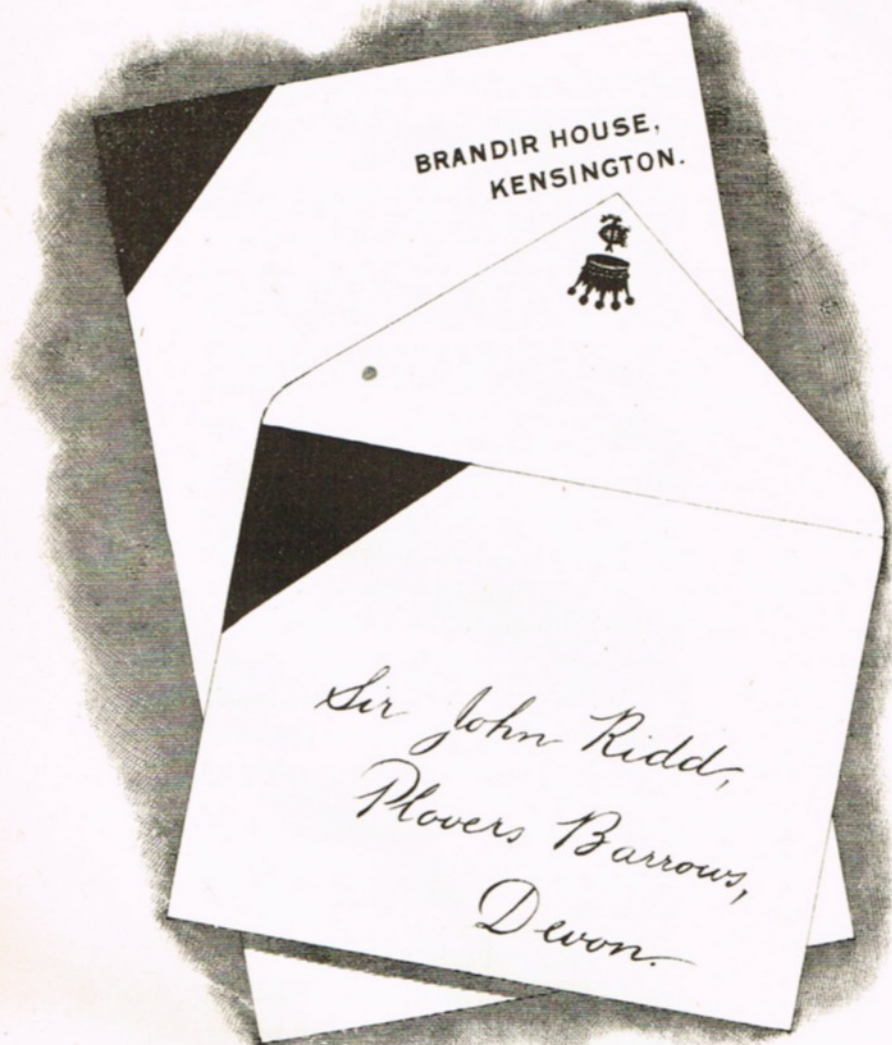
John Dickinson died in 1869.

Contemporary newspaper report following his funeral.

Court Mourning Stationery

REGISTERED UNDER THE PATENTS,
DESIGNS, & TRADE MARKS ACT, 1883

R^o N^o 150635



REDUCED FAC-SIMILE OF DESIGN
SUPPLIED IN ALL ORDINARY NOTE PAPER SIZES.

Sole Patentees & Manufacturers:

JOHN DICKINSON & CO., LTD.,

Manufacturers of the Celebrated Hertfordshire Writings,

65, OLD BAILEY, LONDON, E.C.

MILLS-CROXLEY, APSLEY, NASH, & HOME PARK—HERTFORDSHIRE.

Order of your Stationer.

[OVER

90.9.1,250,000.

In 1890 the company successfully introduced Court Mourning Stationery with a black triangle at the top as a lighter alternative to the traditional black bordered envelopes. All stationery production was done at Apsley.

Stationery

The success of postal reform produced a far greater volume of mail, and so an increasing demand for plain envelopes. Dickinson's embossed postal stationery had consisted of paper cutouts which had to be folded and gummed by hand, but in 1850 he began manufacturing gummed envelopes and by 1876 the company was producing 3 million per week.

Dickinson envelopes



Embossed 1d, inland letter rate
London to Manchester 28 August 1902
Sent from their London office, 65 Old Bailey

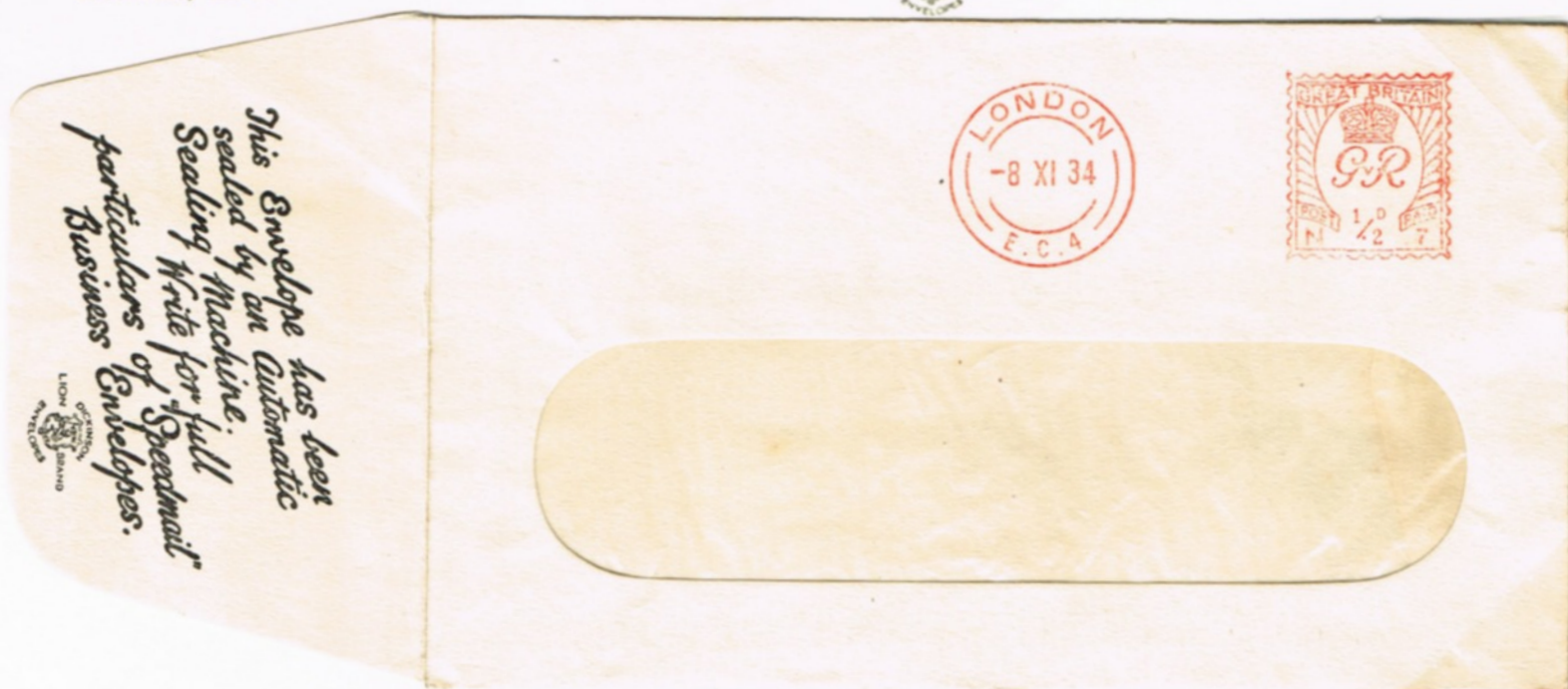


*This Envelope has been
sealed by an Automatic
Sealing Machine.
Write for full
particulars of "Speedmail"
Business Envelopes.*

If undelivered please return to
John Dickinson & Co. Ltd.
65 Old Bailey
London, E.C. 4

The envelope business became an important part of the company's manufacture. Self-seal envelopes using a latex glue were invented in 1934 and first listed in a Dickinson product catalogue in 1937.

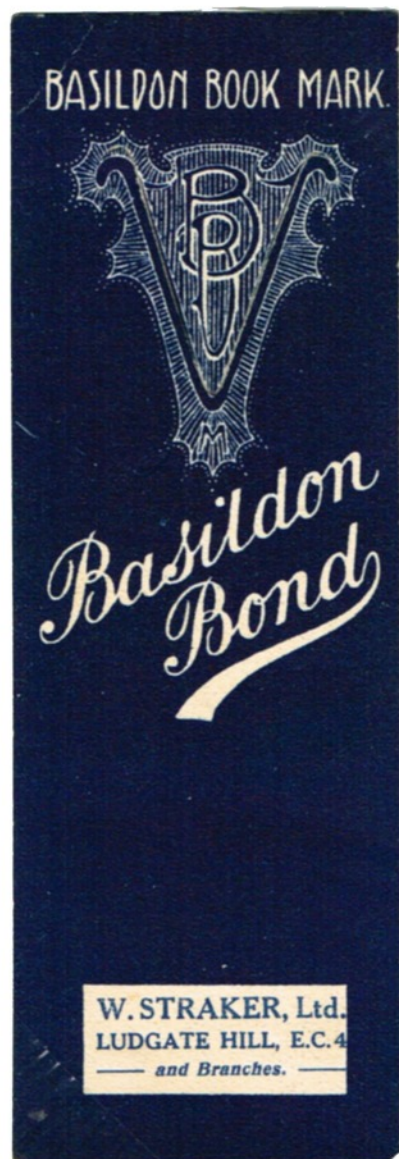
Printed matter rate.



Stationery

During the early twentieth century the company expanded its distribution world-wide, with offices in Canada, South Africa, India, Australia and New Zealand. They adopted the Lion Brand as the company logo in 1910, following a suggestion from their Calcutta office that a universal visual symbol was needed to identify Dickinson products.

Brands and products



Magazine
advertisement 1947

Basildon Bond

In 1918 Dickinson's bought out Millington & Sons, their main rival for stationery, and producer of the Basildon Bond brand, a quality product made with 30% rag pulp. By 1932, when production was moved from Millington's works in Tottenham to Apsley, it had become the best selling notepaper in the UK.

LETTERS THAT LIVE

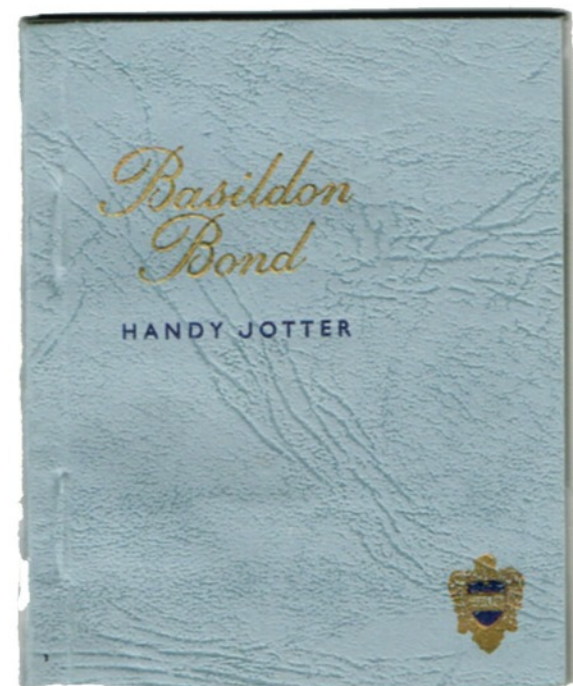
Tchaikovsky to Mme. von Meck

"I READ your letter with gratitude and love too strong for expression in any medium but music. May I be able some time to express it thus! Dear friend, may you keep well. . . . Reading how our symphony caused you sleepless nights, I felt my heart constricted. I want my music henceforth to be

a source of joy and consolation, and with all my strength I desire for you a spirit well and calm."

THE TASTE of a writer is reflected in his writing-paper. That's why discriminating people always ask for Basildon Bond. Make it your choice — give your letters added charm. On sale at all the leading stationers.

Basildon Bond BRITAIN'S MOST DISTINGUISHED NOTEPAPER



Postscript

A smart piece of marketing for the stamp collector:

THE
STORY OF POSTAGE



Presented by
John Dickinson & Co. Ltd.

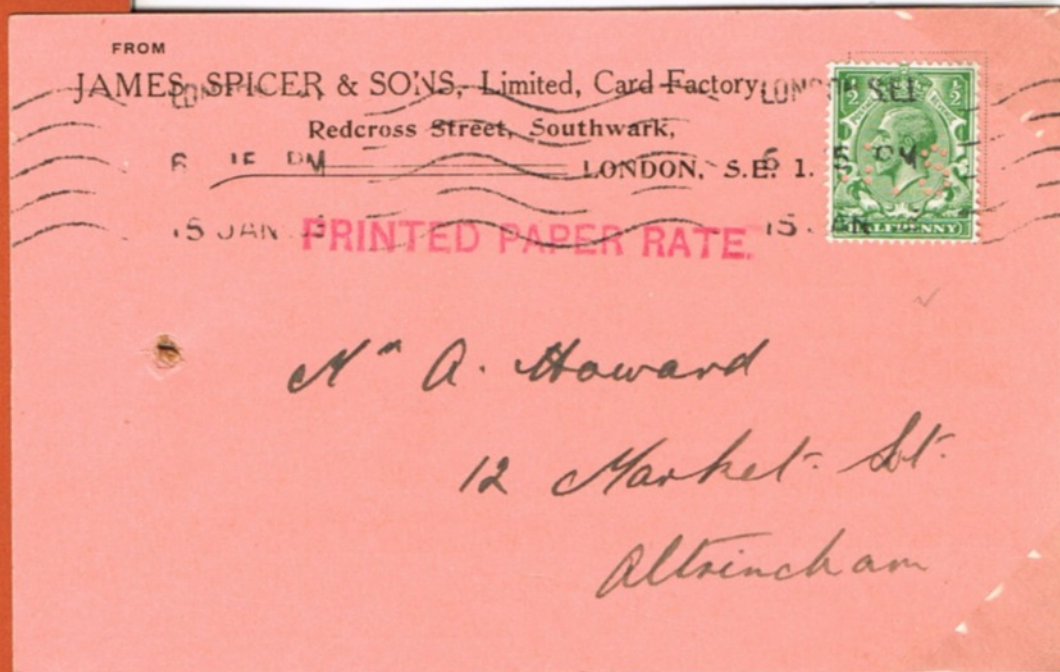
This booklet was published around 1960, giving a very brief history of the post from Ancient Egypt to the first airmails. The last page states:

"This booklet is lithographed by the Book Department, Apsley Mills, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, England, on the famous BASILDON BOND writing paper, made at the Company's Croxley Mills"

Success could not last forever. In 1966 John Dickinson & Co. merged with E. S. & A. Robinson to create the Dickinson Robinson group, later contracted to DRG. In 1996 DRG units were split up and John Dickinson Stationery bought out by Spicers, bringing to an end 187 years of the company.



E. S. & A. Robinson
½d stamp with SE/RA [i.e. reversed] perfin tied by Bristol
machine cancel
30 June 1924



James Spicer & Sons (later known as Spicers)
Perfin J S
Inland printed paper rate up to 2oz