

BACKGROUND TO PRODUCTION AND TENDERING

Glenn H Morgan

The production of stamps has been seen by some companies recently as a simple way of increasing their portfolio of products, but many find that it is not so easy. Printing the basic sheets is not so hard, it is the finishing (perforating, numbering, etc) and, as important, the security requirements, that they struggle with. Stamps are accountable paper and prevention of theft by outside criminals and even staff, plus destruction of waste (where do you think items sold by some dealers as 'printers waste' come from!) can add substantially to the cost of such an operation. Alden and Mowbray and Format International both suffered from these unfortunate problems.

If the British printing industry withdrew its labour force and entered into prolonged strike action, Enschedé (and Cartor - see below) would presumably step in to fill the void. However, closer to home in Ireland is an excellent stamp producer, namely, BDT International Security Printers (BDT). Now that Walsall has established International Security printers (ISP), they have access to printing facilities in France by using the existing Cartor print works and the forthcoming European facility due to be fitted-out for Courvoisier. (The Courvoisier brand was actually retired and so proved not to be an option!)

The writer first became interested in the printing of postage, revenue, trading and poster stamps in early 1970s. The world of print has dramatically altered in those intervening years, not just from the production aspects, but also from the angle of what companies are involved in their creation. Back then, Britain had a strong presence in this specialist market with much production being for countries in the Commonwealth. A number of factors have conspired against British security stamp printers in recent years, resulting in the steady decline of British stamp manufacturing. These factors include:

Deregulation of world-wide postal services.

Britain joining the EEC (now EU) in 1973.

Opening-up of economic markets.

Smaller stamp print runs.

A rise in alternative postal payment methods.

A declining stamp collector market.

Electronic communications, such as mobile phones and the internet,
taking-over from paper-based communication methods.

Commercial printers entering the security printing market due to
access to easier production methods.

Over-capacity in the printing industry.

Less reliance on Britain by Commonwealth countries.

The merging and closure of printing houses.

The economic strength of a country.

and

‘Theft’ of work from traditional printers by the newer players.

TENDERING FOR BUSINESS

From the time of the Penny Black to this day, it is usual for the Post Office to go through a print tendering process. It would be normal to either invite all printers via the trade press to apply or to approach several specific suppliers. Either way, they would be given a full print specification and the work would then be allocated to the most appropriate company - usually the one with the cheapest price, at least these days where cost savings seem to be of paramount importance.

It is not uncommon for printers to supply samples of previously produced work, as issued in the territory concerned, with their tender response, as this graphically illustrates the quality of their output. This is particularly the case with a supplier that may be new to the Post Office procurement team.

At other times, dummy publicity ‘stamps’ are created where the name of the country may be replaced by a word such as CRESCENT (in the case of Waddington’s), or they may bear the actual company name.

In Britain, the most famous tenders were in 1838/9 and then again in 1879/80. On both occasions, a range of very collectable items were created, many of which are now in the hands of philatelists. Some items reached the philatelic market via printing company archive sales, while others were acquired by less honest means, unfortunately.

(Unpublished)