

BRIAN JANES: A Career in Stamp Printing

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I recently had the opportunity of meeting-up with Brian Janes who had retired at the end of 2006 from Walsall Security Printing. Many readers will be familiar with Brian's name, as he has always been a good friend to collectors and was at all times willing to share his considerable knowledge, so long as it did not infringe on the security or confidentiality requirements that surround the production of postage stamps, of course.

This record of our conversation over lunch takes the form of a question and answers session and has been reformatted to keep similar aspects of a subject together.

GHM: *Where were you born, Brian?*

BPJ: Watford, which was, and continued to be, a major centre for printing for many years.

GHM: *What was your first job after leaving school?*

BPJ: I left school in 1963 and was living in Croxley Green close to Watford. My family had a history in the printing industry and so I followed the family trend into the industry. I chose to attend the prestigious printing college in Watford on a full-time course for two years instead of immediately getting a job and studying in the evenings.

As part of that course, I contacted De La Rue and Harrison and Sons for details about security printing and the latter proved to be the most helpful, supplying lots of information. So, when I had concluded the course and it came time to get a job it seemed logical to write to Harrison and Sons to see whether there were any vacancies. The rest is history! I moved to the High Wycombe area to live once I started at the factory.

My first role was cutting-out wet proofs of the stamps and mounting them on to the presentation cards that were then submitted to client postal administrations for approval or amendment. We had hundreds of stamp designs under-way at any one time in those days.

I gradually progressed through the ranks and became Production Manager, then Departmental Manager with a staff of fifty ladies in the finishing section. I then spent some years as Works Manager before being promoted to Works Director, taking-over from John Orford, managing the Royal Mail contract in a semi-technical role.

It was the practice that the person dealing with the Royal Mail contract came from the production side of the business and in fact I was only the fourth person to hold that role in over fifty years of the position.

GHM: *How long did you stay at each of the companies that you worked for and what were your eventual positions?*

BPJ: I was employed for 36 years by Harrison and Sons (from where I reached the level of Works Director, as I have just mentioned), then spent almost five years at De La Rue (following their purchase of Harrison and Sons) and finally worked for five years with Walsall Security Printers (in the role of Special Accounts Manager) with responsibility for the relationship with the Dutch TNT Post and, of course, the British stamp printing contract.

GHM: *What are the most profound changes that you witnessed in the printing of stamps?*

BPJ: I guess it would be the automation of all aspects of production processes, ranging from the mechanical engraving of gravure cylinders, the black art of perforating, through to the mechanisation of many aspects of the finishing operations.

Perforating has seen huge developments in mass production from the sheet rise and fall perforating through to the current APS or grinding technique. This is sometimes called Swedish perforating after the Swedish Chief Engineer at Harrison and Sons who pioneered the technique starting in the late 1960s. There was a short spell of rotary male and female perforating in the Jumelle press developed by Kampf, but the rotary technique of consistently matching 40,000 pins with 40,000 holes proved to be prohibitively expensive and more advanced grinding techniques were developed.

GHM: *How many stamp issues do you reckon that you were involved with down the years?*

BPJ: This is impossible to answer, but it must run into the thousands. In my early days at Harrison and Sons, I was managing around 200 stamp issues at any one time. That was in the days when all the artwork proofing was done by hand without the computerised aids so familiar today.

GHM: *What was your favourite stamp issue that you worked on?*

BPJ: Generally, my favourite stamp choice would have to be any that incorporated recess printing, for there is no finer method of printing. If I may, I would actually wish to nominate two sets as my favourites, both for different reasons.

The *Queen's Beasts* of 1998 were the last issue produced mainly by Harrison before the DLR takeover and technically the tight line for line register between the litho and intaglio recess print methods was extremely difficult and reflects the high levels of skills that were present in the

factory at that time. It was a fitting tribute to the technical and innovative ability of Harrison and Sons over the years.

My second favourite issue is the Beatles stamps issued last year by Royal Mail for the challenge that they offered the printer. They incorporated totally new computer technology in relation to the die-cut simulated free-form perforations used.

GHM: *Where do you see the future of stamps going?*

BPJ: While plastic card technologies might eventually remove the need for banknotes and coins, I believe that there will always be the need for stamps, for they are, at their basic level, a receipt for payment of a service.

There will probably be a greater choice available to the customer and we have seen meter markings and postage paid impressions more and more on our mail, at the expense of traditional stamps. These are now being complemented by PC postage and the Horizon label machines.

GHM: *What about those detested Horizon labels?*

BPJ: These labels are bound not to be popular with the average stamp collector, because they do not resemble traditional stamps. They do, however, fulfil the criteria of what makes a stamp and they additionally offer enhanced security protection and improved accounting methods for any postal administration that uses this type of product.

The opportunity to have made them more attractive has clearly been missed by Royal Mail, but maybe one day they will incorporate security printing in an attractive design – let's hope so, as it will mean more work for an industry that is being affected by falling demand.

GHM: *If you had a crystal ball, how do you reckon that stamp printing would change in the future?*

BPJ: Clearly, digital is the way forward, as with many other aspects of our lives. Innovation and uniqueness is also to the fore and The Beatles stamps would have been unthinkable, even a short while back.

Probably the other major change will relate to how the stamp (in what ever form it might eventually take) is recognised by the electronic equipment that reads it while the mail item is being processed.

The future for stamp printing is, I believe, quite an exciting one.

GHM: *You must have been saddened when Harrison and Sons ceased to exist?*

BPJ: We all were, as it was like one big family. In the late 1970s, the last Harrison left the company, the business having been sold by the family a few years earlier. At that time Harrison and Sons were not only stamp

producers but also general commercial printers producing everything from the early colours inserts for newspapers to travel brochures and designs that eventually became laminates used in kitchens and furniture.

In the early 1980s a new management team installed by the owners Lonhro refocused the company as a security printer and withdrew from most of the commercial products.

All production techniques were now required, including recess printing, and over the next seven or eight year's banknotes, bearer bonds, etc were added to the portfolio of products offered to clients. The break-up of the Soviet Union was seen as a major opportunity for Harrison and Sons and lots of new printing contracts followed.

De La Rue must have seen Harrison and Sons as a thorn in their side for after a while they bought out the company. Some say that it was because of the volume of banknote business that DLR was losing to Harrison and Sons, for around 5% of world banknote production had already moved to High Wycombe in quite a short period of time.

GHM: *What became of the archive that existed of the Harrison and Sons printing history?*

BPJ: I do not know. Presumably it was taken-over by De La Rue as a company asset.

GHM: *“Stamp collectors are mad?” discuss.*

BPJ: (Laughs.) You cannot expect me to be drawn into that argument. Stamp collectors help to keep printers in employment, so that must be seen as a good thing.

GHM: *Who replaced you at Walsall when you retired and what is their background?*

BPJ: My role at WSP was filled by Paul Singleton, who once worked at the House of Questa and is a current member of Royal Mail's Stamp Advisory Committee.

GHM: *How is retirement going and what non-work related interests are you now involved in? I understand that you are a family man?*

BPJ: Yes, I am a family man and they naturally come first. I have been playing more golf (badly, I might add!) and appreciated the opportunity of having a break and a rest from the pressures of work after almost half a century in employment.

I have now settled down into a daily routine and am enjoying my new found sense of freedom. Some of the ex-Harrison and Sons staff still meet-up every so often, which I always look forward to.

GHM: *Thank you for your time and observations. I have enjoyed talking to you and listening to your reminiscences about a role that you clearly were well suited to and for which you were obviously passionate about.*

BPJ: You are most welcome.

About Harrison and Sons Ltd.

Company origins can be traced back to Richard Harrison who, in the mid-1500s, was recorded as a Freeman of 'the mystery and art of printing'. The company was founded by James Harrison in London in 1750 and the company logo changed over the years, but invariably retained the hare, rye and sun rebus.

Harrison and Sons once produced stamps for over 100 countries and its first British contract was in 1881 producing one-shilling embossed stamps for telegram forms, followed by a major contract in 1911 for definitives and from 1934 until the 1980s virtually every British stamp came from Harrison and Sons.

In 1997, De La Rue purchased Harrison and Sons and almost overnight centuries of tradition were swept away when the company changed its name to De La Rue Security Print. Machin definitives continued to use the Harrison and Sons imprint due to the expense of changing cylinders, but gradually changed over to a DLR imprint from late 1998.

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