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| A History of the Rubber Stamp Manufacturers’ Guild  | *‘A brief history, along with collective memories of the Rubber Stamp Industry from members, industry colleagues and friends of the RSMG’**Stan Pratley**2019* |

Table of Contents

Introduction  ………………………………………………….. 2

Technology Changes ………………………………………………….. 3

RSMG History ………………………………………………….. 4

S. Slinger & Son ………………………………………………….. 9

William Jones, Clifton & Co. Ltd ………………………………………………….. 10

William Jones Clifton Ltd ………………………………………………….. 18

COLOP UK ………………………………………………….. 20
GFL (Gutteridge FitzGibbon Ltd.) ………………………………………………….. 21

Kley Brothers ………………………………………………….. 23

E. M. Richford ………………………………………………….. 25
C. Williams ………………………………………………….. 27

John T. Clarke ………………………………………………….. 28

MBF Group ………………………………………………….. 30

Trodat UK ………………………………………………….. 31

Mark C. Brown ………………………………………………….. 32

Eyre & Baxter ………………………………………………….. 33

Advanced Stamp & Plate Co ………………………………………………….. 34

Shorebridge Stamps ………………………………………………….. 37

Evermark Ltd ………………………………………………….. 37

Stewart Superior (Europe) ………………………………………………….. 37

Supreme Rubber Stamp Company ………………………………………………….. 39

Norwich Rubber Stamps ………………………………………………….. 44

Stamps Direct ………………………………………………….. 49

British Rubber Stamps ………………………………………………….. 54

August Engraving (Ireland) ………………………………………………….. 56

Trodat (Austria) ………………………………………………….. 57

COLOP (Austria) ………………………………………………….. 59

Ludwig Ltd ………………………………………………….. 61

Identity Group (USA) ………………………………………………….. 63

UniGraphics (Sweden) ………………………………………………….. 67
Ernst REINER GmbH & Co. KG …………………………………………………… 69

Noris-Color GmbH (Germany) ………………………………………………….. 73

Acknowledgements ………………………………………………….. 75

Disclaimer ………………………………………………….. 76

UK & Ireland Rubber Stamp Makers ………………………………………………….. 77

**Introduction**

Before the Rubber Stamp Manufacturers’ Guild, there were Rubber Stamps……

If you Google “When were rubber stamps first invented, and by whom?”, you will find a number of conflicting opinions offered. Reading through the various links, the following appears to offer a reasonably reliable answer.

According to the online resource site “How Products are Made”, the story of rubber stamps began in 1736 when French explorer Charles Marie de la Condamine discovered rubber in the Amazon River Basin. Initially, rubber was used to erase lead pencil marks. Unfortunately, the rubber turned into jelly when the temperature rose making it ineffective. Charles Goodyear solved this problem in 1839 – when he spilled a mixture of sulphur and gum rubber onto a hot stove thereby curing the rubber. Goodyear named and patented this vulcanization process in 1844. However, throughout the 1800’s objects used as marking devices were made from other non-rubber materials. In fact, mechanical hand stamps (made from metal) were prominent through the 1800’s.

So, when did rubber stamps hit the mainstream? There is an ongoing debate as to which inventor gets the credit for creating the rubber stamp. In the first story, L.F. Witherell of Knoxville, Illinois, claims he invented the rubber stamp when he attached fixed rubber letters onto the end of a bedpost. He then used the post to mark and identify his brand of manufactured food pumps. Unfortunately, Witherell never displayed proof of this claim.
The second story involves James Orton Woodruff who borrowed the vulcanizer his uncle used in his dentistry practice. During this time, rubber was ideal for denture moulds, and the vulcanizers used in the process were also reportedly used for Woodruff’s rubber stamps batch production. While the solvent-containing ink later destroyed the actual rubber stamps, Woodruff’s walnut mounts remain, as well as items that were printed with his stamps.

By 1866 rubber stamps were in high demand, and the production of them became a growing industry. L.F.W. Dorman began to manufacture vulcanizers specifically designed for stamp makers, commercialising the process. By 1892 there were 4,000 rubber stamp manufacturers in the United States alone.

In Great Britain, rubber stamp makers were around from the late 1800’s and the Rubber Stamp Manufacturers’ Guild was formed in London in 1938 by a leading group of nationally based rubber stamp makers to further the interests of the industry.

**Technology Changes**

The Rubber Stamp story started with the development of the traditional rubber stamp, which dominated the market through to the 1970’s when the first self-inking and pre-inked stamps came into the market. Over the following years further new technologies and production methods were introduced so that by the new Millennium the product range had expanded to include, laser engraved rubber stamps, pre-inked “Gel” stamps, pre-inked “Flash” stamps” and electronically operated, hand held, programmable printing stamps. As traditional stamp markets continue to decline, stamp makers look towards new technologies to continue driving the industry forward.

The first Flash stamp technology introduced in Britain came via a system developed in Estonia by Priit Humal. Priit developed the material and a machine that could produce the electronically “flashed” image onto a foam material that was able to absorb ink through a cartridge secured into the base of the stamp mount. The technology was sold under license throughout Europe by Unigraphics, Sweden, until the then CEO at Identity Group, America and owner of Unigraphics, decided that the flash machine, built in Estonia, should only be made available to stamp makers on a rental basis rather than being sold to them. This decision was not well received by stamp makers, which resulted in the system failing to be adopted by the industry. However, the technology was developed by competing companies and introduced under alternative brand names.

Brother launched a flash system which offered a limited range of specific stamp size options. Fast and easy to operate, the machine was successfully marketed to and adopted by, non- stamp industry outlets such as shoe repair shops or small independent retail shops. Although the system never resulted in huge sales, every sale made was another one lost to the traditional stamp industry.

**RSMG History**

The Rubber Stamp Manufacturers’ Guild was constituted on 12th April 1938.

Mr. R.H. Clarke (representing John T. Clarke) became the first President and a founding member of the RSMG. It is also known that Edward Clifton (representing William Jones, Clifton & Co. Ltd.) was at that meeting and it is likely that other founding companies of the Guild who formed the first committee included British Rubber Stamps, Pneumatic Rubber Stamps, Robert Van Houghton, E.M. Richford and C. Williams. At that first meeting, a total of thirty-two companies were elected into membership of the Guild.

Detailed records of the founding of the Guild have been lost over the years during various relocations of Guild’s offices. A history booklet was written in 1988 by Guild Secretary John Roscoe for the 50th Anniversary of the Guild. It included a list of past Presidents dating back to the founding of the Guild and provided an insight into the first fifty years of the RSMG. The booklet was distributed to members to promote the 50th Anniversary event.

Ever since the first meeting, the Guild has involved itself in matters affecting the interests of its members and the industry as a whole. Matters raised at the first meeting included:

* The implications of a trade agreement between Britain and the USA
* Questions of holiday with pay
* Collective advertising
* Pricing matters

Before the days of restrictive practice legislation, it was common for trade bodies to agree prices for a number of years. This formed one of the major areas of activity within the Guild. Social activities also played a major part in the Guild’s calendar, when the recorded cost of the Annual Dinner in 1939 was 7s 6d (or equivalent to 37.5p back in 1988).

The founders of the Guild were very in touch with current events. As an example, in February 1939 they considered the possibility of having the industry designated as a “key industry” in the event of war. They were concerned at the problems of sourcing stamp handles and brass during this hard time for the country. In 1940, steps were taken to ensure certain skilled workers in the trade were included in the schedule of reserved occupations.

World War II brought a necessity for a closer cooperation with government departments which lead to the formation of an export group and the allocation to the industry of a quota from raw materials. At the same time, negotiations with the customs authorities to exclude the industry’s products from purchase tax commenced. Although this relationship became a long standing one with benefits to the trade, the optimistic objective was not achieved.
It was evident and confirmed that the role of the Guild was one of great importance in representing the industry. Subsequently in 1943 six additional members were recruited.

By 1944 a new note of optimism was detected and attention was turned to the question of prices in the post war period. The period of reconstruction in the post-war years was marked by discussions on the disposal of the Government’s surplus stock of the industry’s products and an increasing emphasis on considerations of wages as well as price in the deliberations of the Guild.

By the 1950’s, problems over the supply of skilled labour were emerging and at this stage, signs of the closer links with the rest of the business community started to appear. The implications of the Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1956 were considered in detail and the Guild decided not to register under this Act, which meant the role it played in negotiating and establishing pricing policies came to an end. However, there was still an active role for the Guild to play in providing members with an input to their considerations of commercial matters.

The 1959 AGM was significant in that it saw the end of the seventeen-year Presidency of Mr. A.E. Cole of British Rubber Stamps. Mr. Cole was succeeded by Mr. Charles Ramsden of William, Jones Clifton & Co. Ltd.

In the 1960’s, an addition to the range of topics covered at the Guild’s meetings included the importance of overseas contacts. In 1962, the President Charles Ramsden reported in detail on his visit to the trade fair in Hanover. In 1963, he entertained visitors from a Canadian company who brought with them details of the work of the Marking Devices Association (MDA) in North America. By the mid 1960’s, industrial relations legislation had become a major concern with the introduction of the contracts of Employment Act and Industrial Trading Act. The Guild had become affiliated with the National Union of Manufacturers, who also provided a secretary, but in 1965 it was decided to transfer to the Stationer’s Association at 6 Wimpole Street, London, W1. This change introduced a number of opportunities, including a health care plan and closer ties with the stationery trade generally through its official journal and its participation in the STATINDEX trade exhibition.

During the 1960’s, new issues were arising that affected the industry included fraudulent use of Rubber Stamps and the activities of the decimal currency board. The relationship with the overseas bodies continued to increase with the strong bond formed with the European Trade body, AEGRAFLEX. The Plastics Training Board worked closely with the RSMG throughout the 1970’s and 1980’s, until it unfortunately ceased trading in 1982. In 1968 Charles Ramsden was succeeded as President by Mr. Henry Tyler of Robert Van Houghton.

Legislative matters of concern then moved to include the Health & Safety at Work Act and the Consumer Act, which were introduced during the mid-1970’s. The Guild focussed its efforts on evaluating how these would affect its members and helping its members to conform to these changes.

October 1977 introduced the first ever “Out-of-Town” weekend for the RSMG which was held in Banbury, Oxfordshire. This proved to be a popular social and business event for its members. Over 40 years later, the Out-of-Town weekends are still popular and have become an annual feature of the Guild’s calendar.

In the 1980’s the Guild took an active interest in postal matters, both in expressing its concern when the quality of postal service seemed to decline and also in seeking cooperation with the Post Office in highlighting the benefits of Rubber Stamps for marking items of mail with a return to sender address.

In 1982, a quarterly newsletter was established and circulated to members. The Guild identified the advantages of advertising direct to consumers. It undertook various public relations and advertising campaigns. The promotional side of the Guild’s activities were extended in 1983 when an exhibition of supplier’s products was held in conjunction with the AGM.

Various ways of bringing the use of rubber stamps to the notice of the general public were considered and the discussions led to promotions, the first of which was one run in conjunction with Trodat, featured in the TV Times program magazine and with TV advertising. The second one in 1987 was a video presentation shown in over 500 Post Offices around the country.

On 12th April 1988, the Guild held its 50th anniversary, celebrated with a luncheon at Stationers’ Hall in the City of London, hosted by Stationers’ Hall President, Mark Tollitt of Tollitt & Harvey, with after-dinner guest speaker Jeffery Archer. The Guild at this time had reached 57 member companies.

In 1989, Mr. Gordon King of British Stamps became RSMG President. His idea was to have a European Marking Device Exhibition and Conference for rubber stamp manufacturers. On 31st May 1992, the first E.M.D.E.C. was held at the Regents Park Hotel in London. A majority of the larger manufacturers throughout the world attended and / or exhibited. Thus E.M.D.E.C. was born and has continued to be held on a regular basis throughout Europe for many years.

In 2000, Mr. Michael FitzGibbon became President of the RSMG. E.M.D.E.C. was still going strong at the time but it was felt necessary to join forces with Aegraflex and to hold a combined conference and exhibition. This was held in Krakow, Poland in 2007, and was a great success. Later that same year, the RSMG became a full member of Aegraflex. The exhibition was then renamed The International Stamp and Engraving Exhibition.

In the early 2000’s the Guild moved into the electronic age with the relaunch of its website, introducing new corporate colours and a range of benefits ([www.rsmg.org.uk](http://www.rsmg.org.uk)).

On 11th October 2008, the Guild held its 70th Anniversary during the Out-of-Town weekend at The Castle Green Hotel in Kendal. Eighty-five guests, including companies and affiliates from the USA and Europe helped to celebrate the success and strength of the Guild. During the Gala Dinner, the President introduced a new “Lifetime Achievement Award”, the first being awarded to Stan Pratley of William Jones Clifton Ltd.

Around this time, the Guild became an active group member of “Project Genesius”, run by the Metropolitan Police in London. The group consisted of manufacturing companies who produced all types of personalised identity cards, rubber stamps and the manufacturing equipment criminals could use to produce the fakes themselves. Meetings to help the police to combat these criminal activities were originally held at New Scotland Yard before transferring to offices in the SOCA (Serious Organised Crime Agency) building in Vauxhall, London now known as the NCA (National Crime Agency).

In September 2018, the Guild celebrated its 80th anniversary at the Out-of-Town weekend in London. The event was held at the Regent Hotel, close to St. Paul’s Cathedral. The weekend kicked off on the Friday night with a Gala Dinner held at Stationers’ Hall, featuring after dinner guest speaker, the Rev. Richard Cole, one-time half of pop success group “The Communards”. On the Saturday, members and guests enjoyed an afternoon tour through the state rooms and gardens at Buckingham Palace, before an after-dark dinner and dance cruise along the River Thames.

**RSMG Past Presidents:**
1938 - 1940 R.H. Clarke (John T. Clarke)
1940 - 1942 Edward Clifton (William Jones, Clifton & Co. Ltd.)
1942 - 1959 A.E. Cole (British Rubber Stamps)
1959 - 1968 Charles Ramsden (William Jones, Clifton & Co. Ltd.)
1968 - 1977 Henry Tyler (Robert Van Houghton)
1977 - 1982 Eric Andrews (Pneumatic Rubber Stamps)
1982 - 1985 Edwin Slinger (Slinger & Son)
1985 - 1989 Roger E. Button (Express Rubber Stamps) - (formerly Kettering R.S.)
1989 - 2000 Gordon R. King (British Stamps)
2000 - 2010 Michael M. FitzGibbon (GFL)
2010 - 2012 Stan Pratley (William Jones Clifton Ltd.)
2012 - 2015 Nigel Eyre (ASAP)
2016 - 2017 Ian Bradbeer (Trodat UK)
2018 - Colin Cousins (Stamps Direct)

**RSMG Secretaries:**

1970’s Bill Routledge
1980’s John Roscoe
1990’s Louis Demetrio
2005 - 2007 Angela McKay
2009 - 2011 Phillipa Morrell

2012 - Liz Whyte

**RSMG Lifetime Achievement Awards:**

2008 Stan Pratley
2009 Michael FitzGibbon
2010 Nigel Eyre
2011 Malcolm Whitehead
2012 Barry Roach
2013 Keith Hill
2014 Gordon King
2015 John Don
2016 Lothar Zeitler
2017 Ian Bradbeer
2018 Andy Warmer
2019 Phil Baylis

**S. Slinger & Son Ltd.**

**Stan Pratley’s story…………**

*1961 - I joined S. Slinger & Son - London, straight from school. With little in the way of formal qualifications, my father Lance Pratley saw a sign in a shop window that said “Boy Wanted for Apprenticeship”. Like many others of my fathers’ generation, he believed that if you managed to learn a skill you would have a job for life, so he arranged for me to go for an interview.*

*S. Slinger & Son was an engraving and rubber stamp making company based in Mitcham, South London, owned by father and son Sidney and Edwin Slinger, but the Slinger’s also owned a subsidiary engraving and stamp company just off of Victoria Street in Westminster, less than half a mile from where I grew up and lived. I was signed as an apprentice wood engraver, but after more than four years of training, I came to the conclusion that apart from the craft industry (for which I had no design flair), there would be little future for me if I continued with wood engraving for the commercial print industry, so in the fifth and final year of my apprenticeship, I transferred from wood engraving to typesetting in the autumn of 1965.*

*Rubber Stamp production at Slinger’s was still using 19th century technology, with hand-picked lead type set into a “stick” before being transferred into a steel “chase” which contained multiple stamps settings. The chase was then clamped tight on all four sides before a Plaster of Paris mould on a steel plate was reversed over the chase and pressed gently onto the typeface, with a sheet of Japanese rice paper between the two to absorb any moisture. This process was repeated three or four times to extract as much moisture as possible, before the mould was heated in a gas fired vulcanizing press, baking it slowly to avoid any cracking of the plaster. A sheet of raw rubber was then placed on top of the baked plaster, covered by a sheet of baking paper with a steel plate screwed down tight over it before putting it into the vulcanising press to melt and cook the rubber. After a few minutes, the mould was removed from the press, the steel plate lifted off and the still hot vulcanised sheet of rubber was peeled away from the plaster, cooled and then cut into individual stamp designs. The stamp mounts were all individually made to suit each stamp, using cut lengths of brass strip of various widths. A centre hole was drilled and fitted with a steel spigot ready for a wooden handle to be punched onto the spigot using a fly press.*

**William Jones, Clifton & Co. Ltd.**

1838 - William Jones, Clifton & Co. Ltd. was formed by William Jones and Edward Clifton, opening in Silver Street, near Oxford Circus in London’s West End. Ownership of the company became fragmented over the following 150 years, but the Jones and Clifton families remained shareholders until 1999.

When the company first opened, it specialised in the manufacture of “die sink” engraving which continued to be the core product until the early 1900’s when the business relocated to new premises close to St. Paul’s Cathedral and became involved in the manufacture of rubber stamps. Whilst St. Paul’s Cathedral miraculously escaped the bombing during WWII, the WJC building was less fortunate, being completely destroyed. However, the business survived, due in part to the incredible generosity and support given by other London based stamp makers who fulfilled orders to help keep the company going. While production continued through that support, the business managed to relocate once again, this time to Hanson Street, just off of Oxford Street and close to its original location.

100 years after its 1838 inauguration, the company became one of the founding members of the Rubber Stamp Manufacturers’ Guild in 1938.

The company stayed in Hanson Street until finally leaving London in 1966 when the building was compulsorily purchased by the Government for redevelopment. The Hanson Street building later became part of the new Post Office Tower complex, covering the area between it and Tottenham Court Road. Together with compensation money from the Government for the compulsory purchase of the building, the company was also offered Government assistance to relocate, with a choice of three potential locations. Charles Ramsden, the WJC Chairman, was a friend of Mark Tollit, the Chairman of Tollit & Harvey. Mark was also looking to relocate his business out of London under the same government scheme. The two men visited each of the proposed new locations together and allegedly, one said to the other “If you choose King’s Lynn, so will we”! Both companies opted to relocate to the same brand-new Hardwick Industrial Estate in King’s Lynn.

The company was sold to Posthumus bv, Amsterdam in 1999.

**Stan’s story……….continued**

*1965 - I married my wife Noreen in May 1965. In 1966, our son Derek was born and we were still living with my parents, unable to afford to rent a place of our own in London. I heard about William Jones, Clifton & Co. Ltd., who were based close by, near Oxford Circus and that they were about to relocate out of London to Norfolk under the Governments’ “London Overspill Program”. Any employees who chose to re-locate with the company would automatically qualify for new housing. It was an opportunity not to be missed.*

*Within a week of my application, I had been interviewed by the works manager and offered a job because many WJC employees had chosen not to leave their homes, friends and families behind in London. Alan Sandy was the Managing Director when I joined the company as a handset compositor in August 1966, becoming one of a team of eleven working in the “comps” department, which included a full-time foreman, a proof reader, an Intertype operator, a linotype operator, a Ludlow operator, two vulcanising press operators and four handset compositors. Three months later in November 1966, the company left London and relocated to King’s Lynn, Norfolk. The six pantograph machines in the engraving department on the second floor, and the Intertype, Linotype, Ludlow typesetting machines and the vulcanising presses in the Comps department on the third floor were all dismantled at the end of the working day on the Friday afternoon, swung out on joists hung out over the roof of the building and lowered onto removal lorries in the courtyard below, and driven to King’s Lynn, where they were re-built in the new factory over the weekend, ready for production to start again without delay when the business reopened the following Monday morning.*

*At that time, traditional rubber stamps still made up the majority of stamp production across the whole industry, but times were changing fast. In the mid 1970’s WJC added the Trodat “Printy” range of self-inking stamps to the NCR microporous rubber pre-inked stamp options offered to customers.*

*Around this time, WJC also entered into an agreement with John T. Clarke to cease manufacture of the in-house “Green Palm” dater in favour of buying-in Dormy’s “All-Square” and “Super” daters**. The story goes that the deal was allegedly done on a simple handshake agreement between the two Managing Directors. The Dormy brand had by this time been established as the major supplier of daters, pads, inks and components to the UK stamp making industry.*

*1969 - Around this date, Alan Sandy resigned as Managing Director to open his own business in the south of England, concentrating on making pre-inked stamps.*

*Brian Smith, formerly the sales manager at Ash Rubber Stamps in Birmingham was appointed Managing Director to replace Alan Sandy.*

*1971 - Michael FitzGibbon joined WJC as a sales rep in May, covering the whole of England, but excluding Scotland and Wales.*

*1972 - Michael FitzGibbon appointed Sales Office Manager.*

*1973 - A new law introduced by the government stated that all company invoices must include a company registered VAT number. For the next six months or so, WJC (along with every other rubber stamp maker in the country) was inundated with orders for single line rubber stamps showing a company VAT registration number. Trays of orders labelled Monday to Friday, each showing the date the orders were received, were spread out all along one wall of the factory, with at its peak, trays covering an expected six-week delivery time.*

*With the VAT ‘boom’ over, WJC had lost so much of its primarily London based business that there was every possibility the company could go bust. To ease the financial situation, the new building funded by Government compensation money for leaving London was put up for sale, allowing it to survive by moving into a council rented property. From that point onward, WJC strengthened its sales efforts to become a truly national, primarily trade supplier to the independent stationery and wholesale markets. To satisfy any direct sales opportunities, a small desk was set up in one corner of the sales office under the name Easistamp.*

*1978 - Michael FitzGibbon appointed Sales Director.*

*I was approached by Mike FitzGibbon and asked to consider moving from shop floor production into junior management as assistant to the works director Colin Griffiths.*

*1979 - Around this time, WJC partnered with the French company “Reprotect Diffusion” to make a plastic stamp mount, stopping forever the in-house manufacture of wood handled, and aluminium channel strip mounts. Reprotect Diffusion was owned by John Jacqout and based in Marseilles.*

*1980 - The company decided to introduce a new process for typesetting, choosing the “Edit-writer” equipment supplied by Compugraphic in Wetherby. John Jacqout was already using the Edit-writer equipment in Marseilles, so I was asked to spend ten days in Marseilles to learn how to operate the machine before the confirmation order was placed with Compugraphic. Hard I know, but somebody had to go and spend 10 days in the South of France.*

*1981 - Everything changed again when Brian Smith suddenly and unexpectedly resigned as managing director to be replaced a month later by Yorkshireman, Mike Avery.*

*Mike Avery had no experience of the rubber stamp industry, coming from a construction industry background, manufacturing ceramic piping for groundworks, but he did come with a lot of self-confidence and a very autocratic management style.*

*The next big technological change came with introduction of desk-top publishing, giving typesetters WYSIWYG or “what you see is what you get” design of stamps on screen. The days of a five-year apprenticeship to become a qualified, skilled typesetter were gone forever.*

*Not long after Mike Avery’s arrival at WJC, the quality of the Reprotect Diffusion stamp mounts deteriorated dramatically, resulting in a lot of “flashing” of plastic across where the components were glued together, meaning it was difficult, if not impossible to insert the index paper. In France, John Jacquot refused to invest in refurbishing or renewing the tooling, which in turn resulted in the relationship between the two companies souring, eventually coming to an acrimonious end, leaving WJC without a satisfactory stamp mount supply. Mike Avery quickly set about designing a new mount himself and within months he had blueprints designed, new tooling made, and he found a moulding company to manufacture the product which would eventually have a total range of 64 different shapes and sizes. The stamp mount named “SELECTA” was soon widely used by other stamp makers in the UK and Ireland as well as in our own production.*

*1982 - Following the success of Selecta stamp mounts in the UK, the board established a separate distribution company to sell mounts, company seals and anything else that could be sold to stamp makers. Jones Clifton (Products) Ltd. moved quickly to market and successfully sell Selecta mounts into Europe, Australia and South Africa.*

*1983 - To compete with the rapid expansion of the MBF Group, Mike Avery and the board of Jones Clifton (Investments) decided to expand the in-house manufacture of rubber stamps geographically through investment in new greenfield locations. In Scotland, sales had historically been generated through the services of an agent named Bobby Warren. Bobby was the Sales Director at MacLennon & Rose, a box-file stationery manufacturer in Glasgow, and he had included rubber stamps into the portfolio of products his company sold. Bobby advised the JC(I) board that there was a growing risk of losing Scottish business unless stamps could be made in Scotland, because he said, “Scots like to buy from Scots”.*

*Bobby Warren found a partner for a joint enterprise at one of WJC’s Scottish stationery customers in Glasgow, G. A. H. Douglas. The owner, Alan Todd also owned a printing company in Glasgow called Central Press, and Alan agreed that one corner of the print works could be allocated for stamp production and fitted out with APR liquid polymer stamp making equipment. The staff at Central Press provided the typesetting and darkroom facilities and Jones Clifton (Scotland) Ltd. was born. Two members of staff were recruited to make and assemble the stamps, answer the phones and produce the delivery notes to be sent out to customers with the stamps. Duplicate copies of the delivery notes were sent to King’s Lynn every Friday for invoices to be raised and posted to customers the following week. Mike FitzGibbon was given the task of overseeing the setting up of the new company and visiting the major Scottish customers with Bobby Warren to explain the what and why of the new venture. I was tasked with spending the first month of operation in Glasgow to teach the new staff how to make the stamps, set up the administration systems, deal with telephone calls and dispatch the goods. The new company proved to be so successful that within eighteen months the Scottish business had more than trebled, so laying the template for further expansion. William Jones, Clifton & Co. Ltd. - King’s Lynn, became just one of the stamp-making units, albeit also the head office, whilst all the new operations operated under their individual geographical names.*

*Over the next few years, stamp making operations were set up at Aire Valley Rubber Stamps in Bradford, Jones Clifton (Birmingham) Ltd. in Birmingham’s Jewellery Quarter, and Jones Clifton (Southern) Ltd. in Hailsham, Sussex. The acquisition of Taunton Rubber Stamps in Somerset gave the group six geographical stamp making locations. Later the small predominantly pre-inked stamp making company, Warren Manufacturing based in Coulsden, Surrey was also acquired to join the group, but after a couple of years that company did not succeed and was eventually closed.*

*1984 - In May, Mike FitzGibbon resigned to join H. Savage in London.*

*Three things happened in a relatively short space of time. Mike FitzGibbon resigned as Sales Director, Karl Frie the Accounts Director fell off a ladder while gardening and was never able to return to work, and Works Director Colin Griffiths suffered a stroke resulting in his early retirement. With no other senior management to rely on, Mike Avery asked me as the next most senior member of his team to take over the sales office while he concentrated on overseeing the production, a role he was more familiar and comfortable with.*

*Although I hesitated to make the move into sales, about which I knew nothing, Mike’s advice was simple; - “if you don’t get more than 10% of your decisions wrong, you’ll do OK.” Given the freedom to make my own decisions, I took on the sales role and I along with the company flourished during the fortuitously “good years” of Maggie Thatcher and the 1980’s.*

*Nick Chudasama was recruited as the Accounts Manager to replace Karl Frie.*

*The government decided to introduce new legislation permitting company documents to be signed by a Director without the need for having the authorised imprint of an embossed company seal, the idea being that it would speed up the electronic transmission of data. I wrote to Henry Bellingham the local West Norfolk M.P. to ask for his support in retaining skilled engraving jobs in his constituency. Henry arranged a meeting with Trade Secretary, Francis Maud at the Board of Trade offices in London, which he invited me to attend with him. By the end of the courteous thirty-minute meeting in Francis Maud’s private office, which also included three of his senior advisors, it was obvious that the government’s decision had already been made. Within months, company seal production at WJC dropped from 200-300 pieces per week to just a handful.*

*I can’t remember the exact year, but Nick Chudasama resigned and was replaced by Hedley Cross as the Accounts Manager, and Peter Cawood joined the company as Works Manager, relieving Mike Avery of the day to day responsibility.*

*Mike Avery and I attended our first Marking Device Association (MDA) trade exhibition together in Chicago. Mike said at the time that if he could win 4% of the American stamp market for mounts, the company would more than double its entire existing sales. My memory of that first experience of an American stamp convention was of walking into The Drake Hotel in Chicago and being greeted at the entrance to the exhibition hall by Gunther Hempel of Trodat, Austria. It would be two more years before we met again, but I remember being immensely impressed that when we did meet again, Gunther not only remembered me, but he also remembered my name.*

*That same year, Mike Avery asked me to replace Mike FitzGibbon as the RSMG committee member representing WJC, where at my first meeting held at the BOSS Federation offices in Wimpole Street, London, I received a warm welcome from President Edwin Slinger, RSMG Secretary Bill Routledge and stamp industry giants, Brian Sykes (JTC), Sidney Beddoes (C. Williams), Richard Chapman and John Denver (Pneumatic R.S.), John Richford (E.M. Richford), Tom Cook (John Meerloo) and Janice Hills (Supreme R.S.).*

*Mike Avery did not enjoy long distance flying and he never felt comfortable fronting the company, preferring to run the business in his normal autocratic management style from his office. From then on, Mike left all of that side of the business, fronting the company to me. I continued to attend RSMG meetings, MDAI exhibitions, UK trade exhibitions, monthly East Anglian BOSS branch meetings and any and all other customer and trade events.*

*1985 - During my second MDAI trade show visit when the show was held in San Diego, I first met Dick Rivard, a stamp maker based in Mankato, an hour’s drive from Minneapolis. A month later, Dick flew fly to England with his Sales Manager, John Ronlund to see the Selecta mount in production for himself before placing his first order for 50,000 mounts. Dick remained a loyal customer until he sold his business in the 1990’s to retire and live in Las Vegas, but we remain good friends and still correspond regularly.*

*That year, William Jones, Clifton & Co. Ltd. acquired the stamp maker HMD (Howdale Marking Devices) from Doug Potten, the owner of Masson Seeley, an engraving and signage company that included the small HMD stamp division based in Downham Market, fifteen miles from King’s Lynn. Doug Potten had previously also been the original owner of August Engraving in Dublin until he sold the business to Tony Byrne, and it was Tony who introduced Doug to Mike Avery, instigating the talks that eventually led to the sale of HMD to WJC. HMD were the only UK stamp maker at that time using a new range of self-inking stamps manufactured in Austria by the relatively unknown company, COLOP. At the time COLOP’s range consisted of just four sizes of the “Soft” brand of self-inkers. WJC immediately adopted the COLOP brand into production and from that date, took on distribution of the rapidly expanding COLOP range alongside Selecta rubber stamp mounts.*

*In America, Bill Hackmann was the owner of a distribution company based in Chicago called “Express Marking Products”, supplying the rubber stamp industry in the U.S. with components and materials. After talking to Bill at a couple of MDAI shows, he agreed to add the Selecta mount range to his product portfolio. I was ecstatic, knowing that Bill enjoyed a superb reputation for supplying goods on a “same day” or “overnight” service, often delivering faster than the makers of the goods he supplied, but after persevering for two years, he eventually had to admit defeat and called time on the Selecta mounts, because as he said, American stamp makers preferred to stick with their traditional wood strip mounts, even though the in-house cutting of the wood strip to length before fitting a wooden handle was an intensively laborious production method. Although Dick Rivard remained a regular customer until his retirement, the Selecta mount never managed to crack the American market with any further sales.*

*The WJC board decided to change the company name, in order to simplify it and provide it with a more up-to-date image. Under the umbrella of the holding company, Jones Clifton (Investments) Ltd., William Jones, Clifton & Co. Ltd. became Jones Clifton Ltd. with all promotional activities marketed as the Jones Clifton Group.*

*1987 - I was appointed Sales Director for the Jones Clifton Group by the board of Jones Clifton (Investments) Ltd., which comprised, Chairman Gordon Hills, Joe Walker (grandson of founder Edward Clifton), Company Solicitor John Tyler and Managing Director Mike Avery.*

*1990’s - In the early 1990’s, JC(I) Chairman, Gordon Hills suffered a heart attack and passed away. Gordon was succeeded as Chairman by fellow board director John Tyler, a Solicitor who lived in Tunbridge Wells. John led the company through the early and successful years of the 1990’s until he died suddenly in hospital during a minor operation while still on the operating table. John’s death left Mike Avery and Joe Walker as the two sole surviving majority shareholders. Together, they bought John Tyler’s shares from his widow but with Joe Walker already in his 80’s, the future long-term control of the business was uncertain, leaving Mike in particular, vulnerable to a potential hostile bid for the company.*

*1994 - The company invested in its first laser engraving machine, choosing the equipment and system supplied by M&R Marking of New Jersey, USA.*

*1997 - At an EMDEC exhibition in Prague, a rumour ran around exhibitors that the Jones Clifton Group was up for sale, a rumour that Mike Avery later confirmed to be true.*

*1998 - A consortium of Jones Clifton directors that included David Hills, Tony Jones and myself attempted to secure an internal management buy-out of the company. As I was the one who worked in the head office with Mike Avery, I was nominated to lead the negotiations, which were wholeheartedly supported by the board of Jones Clifton (Investments) Ltd. However, Mike Avery on behalf of the parent board refused to answer a list of financial questions submitted by our financial advisor. We were told that as Directors, we were already in possession of the answers to the questions we had raised, whereas in fact, not being directors of JC(I) meant that we were not in possession of any of the decisions made at JC(I) level. Ultimately, we were left with little option other than to withdraw our interest.*

*1999 - The Jones Clifton Group was sold to Posthumus bv, Amsterdam.*

*Following the sale of the group to Posthumus, Taco van der Platts (the new Chairman), opened his first meeting by stating that all of the regional stamp making operations including the head office facility in King’s Lynn would be closed, in order to develop the Birmingham operation into a major manufacturing and distribution facility and Taco believed fervently that Birmingham was the centre of the universe as far as UK distribution was concerned. In anticipation of Mike’s imminent retirement, I was offered the position of Managing Director of the new operation in Birmingham.*

*2000 - Mike Avery retired and left England with his wife Nina to live in Wuppertal, Germany.*

*In August, I was appointed Managing Director and Jones Clifton Ltd. opened the doors to its newly decorated and equipped building in Lower Essex Street, Birmingham. Taco van der Plaats’ son Alexander was sent to Birmingham to learn the rubber stamp trade, working under my direction.*

*In Amsterdam the decision was made to close all of the regional stamp making operations immediately after the opening of the new Birmingham building, which meant that we had to transfer all of the production and customer database information from multiple locations simultaneously and virtually overnight. Within a few weeks of opening in Birmingham, a huge recruitment program saw staff levels rise from the original five employees at the old Hockley building, to more than twenty, using local recruitment agencies to fill the posts. With so many staff being new and inexperienced, the company quickly became overwhelmed and unable to provide the level of service demanded by customers. Our new accountant, recruited in the first month of opening, struggled to integrate new inter-company IT accounting systems, resulting in numerous paperwork errors, invoice errors and queries, leading to payment delays of invoices, many of which were never resolved. Customers increasingly began to lose confidence in our supply capabilities and rapidly began to desert us in favour of more reliable suppliers.*

*2002 - Kiran Mistry was appointed sales director.*

*Less than four months after Kiran joined in the February and two years after the company had moved into the Lower Essex Street building, I received a telephone call from our bank to advise me that our overdraft facility had been reduced to an unsustainable level, effectively making us insolvent. 24 hours later, the company was put into administration. Up until that point, I had been acting as the middle man between the bank, who insisted on additional head office funding from Amsterdam, and the chairman, who refused to invest further monies before the next financial year-end. With neither side willing to back down, it was all over……*

*On 5th June 2002, the bank appointed KPMG Receivers and the business was put up for sale. KPMG agreed to fund the business for two weeks, employing Kiran Mistry and three other staff members to keep the production running while they sought a buyer. I was asked to stay on for those two weeks without pay (in order to protect my statutory redundancy rights) and try to help KPMG to find a buyer.*

*Over the next two weeks, we worked from 5am until midnight, making and dispatching goods to retain as many customers as possible. Some stamp makers did visit the building to see what was on offer, but there was little serious intention by anyone to buy the business. During the second week of KPMG funding, I sat with Kiran after a long day’s work and we decided to put a business plan together and try to buy the company ourselves. It was a stressful but exciting time. At the end of the process, we were finally successful and we became the new joint owners.*

**William Jones Clifton Ltd. - (The Relaunch)**

*On 22nd June 2002, two weeks after Jones Clifton Ltd. was liquidated, KPMG sold the assets of the company to Stan Pratley and Kiran Mistry. From that day forward, the in-house joke was that it had taken me thirty-six years to build the old company up, and Kiran less than four months to shut it down.*

*The new company was inaugurated and re-launched under its original name in honour of the founding fathers. At that point, the company still included three separate operations - Jones Clifton Ltd. the rubber stamp business, Jones Clifton (Signs) Ltd. a signage and engraving business and Jones Clifton (Products) Ltd. a components business supplying the rubber stamp industry. The sign and components businesses were both under the same roof in Beccles, Norfolk. On 23rd June, just one day after acquiring the whole of the company, we sold the sign and components businesses to two separate, pre-agreed buyers.*

*Keeping staff numbers deliberately low and with the support of some existing and loyal customers, the company went on to successfully market itself as being a lot bigger than it actually was. Over the following ten years, WJC enjoyed huge success in its traditional stationery markets, increasing the customer base and winning “Supplier of the Year Award” in our category from the NEMO Group three times.*

*2003 - Kiran and I launched Arrow Marking LLP, a distribution company, at the EMDEC exhibition in London. Operating out of the WJC building in Birmingham, we originally supplied only inks on behalf of Noris-Color, Germany, but that was quickly complimented by components and equipment from M&R Marking, New Jersey and Jackson Marking Products, Illinois, both in the USA, and we continued to supply the COLOP, Austria products as part of the portfolio.*

*2004 - I was appointed “Director at Large” (formerly International Director) of the American IMIA (International Marking Device Association), liaising between the RSMG and its North American equivalent.*

*2008 - I was honoured by the RSMG to receive the first ever “Lifetime Achievement Award” for services to the rubber stamp industry at the annual out-of-town weekend in the Lake District.*

*2009 - William Jones Clifton Ltd. was sold to COLOP, Austria, already owners of Mark C. Brown in Hull, providing me with a three-year retirement plan.*

*Kiran was appointed Managing Director of Mark C. Brown in Hull.*

*2010 - I was elected President of the RSMG after Mike FitzGibbon stood down from the position, following ten years in the role.*

*Kiran was appointed Managing Director of William Jones Clifton Ltd.*

*2011 - Chris Brown retired at MCB and Mark C. Brown closed its offices in Hull to relocate to the WJC building in Birmingham. WJC and MCB shared production facilities but continued to operate separately to service and supply their respective customers.*

*2012 - Following the closure of Ludwig Ltd. In St. Albans, the distribution of COLOP and REINER components was moved to Birmingham. Ex-Ludwig employee Andy Warmer joined the company to head up component sales.*

*I retired in September 2012 after more than 46 years with WJC and 51 years in the industry.*

**Kiran Mistry’s story…………**

*I started working aged 17 as a warehouseman for Photomarkets, based in the Bull Ring in Birmingham, progressing quickly to become a service department administrator and part-time salesman. A year later and with a flair for all things electrical, I became the resident expert for a new sub-department selling Sinclair ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64 home computers. The company sadly folded in 1983, so in the words on the infamous politician Norman Tebbit, “I got on my bike” and cycled to London in search of a job. I worked for Pelling & Cross, a specialist retailer aimed at professionals, managing their Service Department. As my expertise in professional equipment grew, I came across some famous photographers such as David Bailey.*

*In 1984, Jessops opened their 10th camera shop in Birmingham, so I returned home to Birmingham to take up a job as assistant manager at the store. Over time, I became the trouble shooter for Jessops around the country and helped to open new stores. Aged 24, I became the youngest Area Manager, running 10 stores in the Midlands with a turnover of £8m and responsibility for 110 colleagues. In the following years I got involved in various projects for the company, eventually opening 165 of the 184 stores in the group.*

*At the age of 30, I married my wife Nila and in 1993 our daughter Krishna-Kamal was born.*

*I left Jessops in 1997 to undertake a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree at Warwick University, after which I spent three months in South Africa undertaking further studies at the University of Cape Town.*

*Back in England, I was tracked down by Jessops chairman, Tim Brookes, who offered me the role of Managing Director on the back of a planned flotation of the business. My initial post on my return to Jessops in 1999 was that of Operations Director, managing £240m turnover and 2,500 colleagues across by that time, 280 stores. This was the era of dramatic technological change, with mobile phone and e-commerce in its infancy and the introduction of innovative digital camera technologies. However, Jessops were not investing in these areas, so I took the difficult decision to leave the company in 2001. Sadly, Jessops folded for those very reasons five years later.*

*In 2002, I was appointed Sales Director at Jones Clifton Ltd.*

**COLOP U.K.**

2013 - The businesses of William Jones Clifton and Mark C. Brown were merged into one company with the name changed to COLOP UK Ltd., operating from the Lower Essex Street building in Birmingham. Over the following five years the company continued to expand its stationery market sales activities whilst growing market share in the wholesaler markets.

Andy Warmer joined the company after Ludwig Ltd. closed in mid-2012. He leads the department supplying components to the stamp industry and also heads up the sales of REINER products in the UK.

2019 - At the end of May, COLOP UK re-located to its new home close to Star City, next to Spaghetti Junction and the M6 motorway.

Stan Pratley conducted the soft opening on 3rd June 2019.

The new e-Mark electronic stamp was launched worldwide by COLOP, Austria and in the UK at the Stationery Show in the Design Centre, London.

The company’s grand opening was on 4th September with Ernst Faber and Franz Ratzenberger as chief guests, along with industry colleagues, suppliers and customers.

The company is changing with sights set on three sectors: (a) Traditional stamp market (b) Digital products such as e-mark and REINER electronic stamps (c) newly acquired from Royal Posthumus, COLOP Arts and Crafts.

October 2019 saw the e-mark sold successfully on national “Create and Craft” TV shopping channel.

**GFL – (Gutteridge FitzGibbon Ltd.)**

GFL (Gutteridge FitzGibbon Ltd.) was launched in 1984 and was based in Hackney, East London. The company was a partnership between two Michael’s, Michael FitzGibbon and Michael Gutteridge.

**Michael FitzGibbons’ story……..**

*In September 1970, I left the RAF and joined William Jones, Clifton & Co. Ltd. as the company sales rep for England.*

*Through Bobby Warren, our agent in Scotland, I first met Michael Gutteridge. Mike’s father had owned Spicers before selling it to a management buy-out, leaving Mike at a loose end, so after learning about the stationery trade while staying with Bobby Warren at Bobby’s wife’s B&B in Stirling, he was back home selling box files for Bobby in England.*

*1972 - In June, I was promoted to sales office manager and I moved from my home in Newmarket to live in King’s Lynn. In August of that same year, Managing Director Brian Smith asked me to represent the company at RSMG meetings.*

*1976 - I was promoted to the board of William Jones, Clifton & Co. Ltd. as Sales Director.*

*Around 1980, The RSMG asked me to take on the role of Vice President to President Edwin Slinger.*

*1983 - I was responsible for the opening of William Jones Clifton (Scotland) Ltd. in Glasgow.*

*Later that same year, I left WJC to join H. Savage in London as Sales Director, and while I was there, I asked Mike Gutteridge to become our agent in England. Then I found out that the American owners of H. Savage were selling the company to John T. Clarke, so with the redundancy money I received as a golden handshake on completion of that deal, I went to see Mike Gutteridge at his home in Hadley Wood and asked him if he would like to start up a new rubber stamp company with me in London.*

*At first, Mike was not sure but he eventually agreed and we decided to give it a go. We both put £10,000 each into starting GFL in Hackney, East London.*

*1984 - When we launched GFL, I looked after the works while Mike Gutteridge looked after all the selling, and boy was he good at that. The company took off and in our first year, we turned over £95,000 employing just four people. I also resigned as Vice President of the RSMG in the same year in order to concentrate on the new business.*

*1998 - In September, we sold the GFL business to E.M. Richford Ltd. Both Mike Gutteridge and I were invited to join the board of Richfords.*

*Later that same year, I was asked by the RSMG to take on the role of Vice President again, this time to President Gordon King.*

*2000 - I became President of the RSMG and I started to organise the Guild’s annual Out-of-Town Weekend which I did with my wife Jenny for the next fifteen years. Together we enjoyed organising the events, including finding suitable Hotels, the weekend menu’s, the Friday and Saturday night entertainment and the Saturday morning activities.*

*2003 - Mike Gutteridge was diagnosed with a brain tumour, a huge shock to everyone. After a short illness, he tragically died, far too young.*

*I retired from the rubber stamp industry in in March 2008, but continued as RSMG President until 2010.*

*2011 - I applied to become a contestant on BBC TV’s “Master Chef” and I was delighted to win the regional heat.*

**Kley Brothers**

Kley Brothers was a rubber stamp company owned by two German born brothers, based in Bootle, Liverpool. During WWI, the two brothers decided to move back home to Germany, leaving a manager to run the business in their absence. They expected to return to England after the war ended, but in their absence the business declined, finally going into receivership.

Two friends were sitting in a pub having a drink and reading the local newspaper listings for businesses for sale. With little money between them, the two friends decided to look specifically at the companies offered by local receivers and they selected the two companies that they thought offered the best opportunity for each of them to build a successful future. Having chosen the two companies, the friends tossed a coin to see who would buy which business. One friend bought “The Pioneer Pencil Company” and the other man, Archibald James Leadsom, bought Kley Bros.

Over the next decade, the company grew successfully. During the 1930’s, John T. Clarke of Stockport acquired a 50% share of the business allowing the company to expand further. Kley Bros. continued, run by John Kenneth Leadsom (son of Archi.).

Sometime later, John Leadsom helped a friend called Tony Keithley to establish the engraving and rubber stamp business, “Tomlin’s”, also in Liverpool.

At one time, Kley Bros. was alleged to be the largest manufacturer of rubber stamps in the country, boosted in part by its exclusive contract with Midland Bank for the supply of their rubber stamps across the whole of the UK.

After the death of John Leadsom, management of the Kley Bros. business passed to his son, Robert Leadsom.

By the 1990’s, the business had lost the Midland Bank contract. The company went into a slow decline, became insolvent and was eventually closed for good after receivers Grant Thornton failed to find a buyer.

Robert Leadsom joined the Jones Clifton Group in a sales capacity, opening a ‘sales only’ office in Bootle, Liverpool called Clifton Marking, transmitting all orders electronically to Jones Clifton (Birmingham) for production and distribution.

**Frank Thompsons’ story…………**

*1972 - I was married to John Leadsom’s daughter Edith when I joined Kley Bros. at the age of thirty.*

*1984 - Twelve years after joining Kley Bros. I left the company to join MBF as a sales rep.*

*1986/87 I transferred to another MBF group company, John Berkley in Birmingham as General Manager.*

*1990 - After a three-year stint in Birmingham I transferred again, this time to another MBF group company, John T. Clarke / Dormy Ltd. where I was appointed a director.*

*1994 - I left the rubber stamp industry for two years.*

*1996 - I joined Roger Needham in Salford as Manager.*

*1997 - I was appointed a director at Roger Needham.*

*2007 - I retired, but continued as director, working from home, where I dealt mainly with the rail companies for the next five years.*

*2012 - I retired aged 70.*

**E. M. Richford**

The company was formed in 1878 by Edwin Miller Richford (a chemist) who started manufacturing rubber stamps in East London. The business quickly grew to become one of the largest stamp makers in the UK.

The company re-located to Sudbury in Suffolk during the 1970’s where it is still based.

During the 1970’s & 1980’s, under the stewardship of John Richford, the Richford Group expanded to include a number of satellite stamp makers in Walthamstow, Leicester, Byfleet and central London.

Also, during the 1980’s, the company became a major supplier of components and raw materials to other rubber stamps makers in the UK and overseas.

At the same time, the company saw the growing potential in the craft market for hand-crafted greetings cards and personalised rubber stamps. A range of designer rubber stamps with the hobbyist in mind was enhanced with sales of a wide selection of craft consumables.

In 1995, the company launched a separate business called “Personal Impressions” and became one of the first brand managers in the UK, with some of the original brands still being distributed. At one time, Personal Impressions were instrumental in providing ranges of stamp kits to the QVC TV shopping channel.

Andrew Richford, the great, great nephew of the company’s founder worked in the business from the age of 21, originally managing some of the smaller satellite offices before working in the main building in Sudbury.

Following the death of John Richford, his son Andrew took on the role of Managing Director.

In 2019, Andrew sold the company to Ray Napper and John Wright in an internal management buy-out.

**Malcolm Whiteheads’ story…………**

*Richford’s had a large trade in providing materials and equipment to stamp makers in developing countries overseas when I joined the company in 1970 as Export Manager while it was still located at Snow Hill, London.*

*The decision to move the company to Sudbury, Suffolk had already been made and the GLC’s scheme to encourage companies to relocate to new and expanding towns offered me and Christine - my wife to be - the chance of moving to better housing in Sudbury.*

*After Roy Adams (Richford’s Works Manager) left the company to start his own business (Ace Marking) in Bristol, I was appointed General Manager in 1973 - a title that encompassed many and varied roles as the company continued to develop its interests over the following years.*

*In 2002 I was appointed Operations Director, concentrating more and more on the craft division ‘Personal Impressions’ as the company rapidly expanded into that market sector.*

*I retired in 2014 after forty-four years with E.M. Richford.*

**C. Williams**

**Barry Roaches’ story…….**

*Lennie and Sidney Beddoes were brothers, and joint owners of C. Williams in Liverpool.*

*Lennie died suddenly leaving Sidney to run the business alone.*

*Sally Grey was the Sales Director and Irene Pywell the Company Secretary.*

*I joined the company on 6th April 1970 as an apprentice compositor. Later, Sally Grey asked me and Paul Collins if we would like to work for her and move into the sales department. Paul made the move straight away and I followed three years later as the sales rep for Yorkshire and the North East.*

*Russell Beddoes, Sidney’s son was brought into the business, eventually running it after being appointed Managing Director.*

*Russell sold the company to Robert Dickson during the early stages of the growth of the MBF Group.*

*My role expanded to cover the whole country under MBF and later as part of the renamed Dormy Ltd.*

*I continued the sales role for Trodat UK after Robert Dickson sold the business in 2000.*

*I will retire on 6th April 2020, exactly 50 years to the day after first joining the rubber stamp industry.*

**John T. Clarke**

John T. Clarke was based in Stockport, becoming one of the largest stamp makers in the UK and a founding member of the RSMG.

Legend has it that at an RSMG committee meeting, it was proposed that a group of stamp makers should (as a consortium) form a new company to supply components at the best competitive prices to the industry. The new company called ‘Dormy Ltd’, was initially intended to make and supply a range of inks and stamp pads and be based in the JTC building in Stockport.

John T. Clarke later acquired the Dormy company, adding the ‘All-Square’ and ‘Super’ date-stamps to the range of Dormy branded products offered. Eventually the Dormy daters dominated the UK market to such an extent that it resulted in all other British stamp makers ending the in-house manufacturing of their own daters.

Arthur Brooks the Managing Director was succeeded by Brian Sykes, who was assisted by Sales Director, Anita Henshall. It has been alleged that whilst many stamp makers were slightly embarrassed to admit their occupation when asked “what do you do for a living?”, at one stationery trade event, Anita replied, “I make rubber stamps and I drive a Lotus Elite. What do you do?”

**Phil Baylis’ story………**

*I joined John T. Clarke in 1989, employed by Anita Henshall to work with Ken Hale and Alan Bowyer in the sales office. The Stockport operation was housed in a 35,000 square foot building comprising offices and factory (with planning permission for further expansion), employing 120 people.*

*Managing Director Brian Sykes and Sales Director Anita Henshall were avid Conservative Party supporters which led to a visit by Margaret Thatcher during one of the election year countrywide canvassing tours.*

*After JTC became part of the MBF Group, it not only supplied Dormy products, but at its peak, also became a distributor for Artline / Xstamper, the largest marker pen manufacturer in the UK, supplying over 1 million pens per annum. Eventually the Artline / Xstamper business was sold off to Sally Grey so that it could operate as an independent company and avoid conflict with Dormy’s own manufactured products.*

*Over time, the number of MBF owned companies reduced as they were closed until only three remained, MBF in Paisley, Dormy in Stockport and Diamine Inks in Liverpool.*

*I was made Sales Office Manager, roughly in 1996.*

*Following the sale of the companies to Trodat in 2000, I was appointed Customer Services Manager, based in Stockport, but spending two days each week in Paisley.*

*Soon after the acquisition by Trodat, Diamine was sold to Chris Hesketh and the Stockport building was sold. All the remaining stamp production was moved to Trodat in Paisley.*

*Around 2002, I became the Sales Manager responsible for the RSM channel.*

*At this point in time I am currently responsible for Paul Spires along with the UK Sales Manager for the Power Channel and Education Channel in the UK.*

**MBF Group**

MacFarland Business Forms was a small continuous stationery printing company owned by Sir Norman MacFarland, based in Paisley, Scotland.

The story going around the industry at the time was that sales manager Robert Dickson had been appointed Managing Director in an attempt to rebuild the business and make it profitable. After looking around at what he had inherited, Robert allegedly decided that the only part of the business making any money was the small rubber stamp operation in one corner of the factory, so he concentrated on that and let the print side of the company go.

Over the next few years and with the financial support of the MacFarland Group, Robert went on to successfully build the MBF Group nationally and in doing so, made it into the largest influence on stationery markets, allegedly dominating up to 45% of the stamp industry. By the mid 1980’s, MBF had already acquired many of the leading UK stamp makers including, C. Williams (Liverpool), John Meerloo (London), Pneumatic Rubber Stamps (London), John Berkeley (Birmingham), Diamine Inks (Liverpool) and eventually around 1985/86 John T. Clarke (Stockport) which included the Dormy brand with its supplies of components to the stamp making industry.

1990 - Under MBF ownership, Frank Thompson, previously the Sales Director at Kley Bros. joined Dormy Ltd.

1992/93 - Robert Dickson led an internal management team in a buy-out of the MBF Group from Sir Norman MacFarland at a cost reported to be circa £6.2m. The team included Robert Dickson, George Cook, Malcolm McIntyre, Sally Grey and Alan Hayes. Alan Hayes later dropped out to be replaced by Derek Brown.

The MBF name was changed to Dormy Ltd. with the various group companies under Robert’s leadership continuing to manufacture stamps as well as distributing goods and components to stamp makers. In a deal with UniGraphics Sweden, the company launched the “Dormy” branded pre-inked stamp range using its own bespoke UniGraphics stamp mount, with the added cost benefit coming from production of their own in-house pre-ink gel, manufactured in Liverpool by Diamine Inks.

The Dormy Group was eventually sold to Trodat, Austria in May 2000 before being re-branded Trodat, UK in 2008.

**Trodat UK**

Following Trodat’s acquisition of the Dormy Group in 2000, Ian Bradbeer was appointed Managing Director in 2001. All group stamp making production was transferred to Paisley.

2004 - Acquired Ash Rubber Stamps.

2008 - Dormy rebranded as Trodat UK.

2011 - Acquired A-Pak Ireland.

2012 - Acquired Pioneer Rubber Stamps.

2013 - Acquired Kershaws Rubber Stamps.

2017 - Acquired Superstickers.

2018 - Stuart Login appointed Managing Director.

2019 - Acquired Supreme Rubber Stamps.

**Stuart Logins’ story…….**

*I joined Trodat as Managing Director in 2018, following 11 years working at Avery UK, latterly as Sales Director.*

*Prior to joining the stationery industry with Avery, I worked in publishing for a few years which was preceded by 12 years in the UK photographic sector, culminating in a National Account Manager role at Kodak UK.*

**Mark C. Brown**

The company was founded in Hull during the early 1930’s by Mark Carhill Brown, originally opening as a printing business. His son Mark Kenneth Brown and his siblings all attended Hull Grammar School but only Mark Kenneth was allowed to stay on and go to university. He joined his father in the business after serving during WWII from 1940-1945 by which time Mark senior was nearing retirement age. Mark senior passed away around 1952.

The company started to make rubber stamps about the time of Queen Elizabeth’s coronation in 1953, using a plaster of Paris mould in a sink in the backyard at home.

**Chris Browns’ story…………**

*I joined the business in 1965 after leaving school. I completed a formal NGA (National Graphical Association) apprenticeship and a three-year Printing Technology course in Leeds. One of my first jobs working in the company was to be a relief Intertype operator when the new machine arrived, after my father encouraged me to take extra lessons in the linotype department at Leeds. The company prospered and soon had three such machines, plus Ludlow’s and they were working double day shifts.*

*The second big leap was the opening of a lithographic printing section with fully equipped dark room facilities.*

*The third big leap was the fully integrated order processing invoice system, the C5000 from Tom May in the United States in around 1989/1990.*

*My daughter Claire joined the company in 1992.*

*By 1995 the company boasted Staples and Viking among their customers, but wanting pan European coverage, I realised our vulnerability and so decided to seek out a partner. The company enjoyed a successful partnership with U.S. Stamp and then with UniGraphics, Sweden before being acquired by COLOP, Austria in 2006.*

**Eyre & Baxter**

Eyre and Baxter, was formed in Sheffield by Sylvanus Eyre and Jack Baxter in 1913 and produced steel stamps, nameplates and other marking devices. They also supplied rubber stamps but factored them using John T. Clarke and Kley Brothers.

In 1951 the company incorporated and became Eyre and Baxter (Stampcraft) Limited. In 1951 Sylvanus Eyre died, passing his shares to his daughter Glynis.

In 1956 John Eyre, Sylvanus’s nephew, joined the business as Sales Director.

In the 1990’s Jack Baxter retired and his son John Baxter became Managing Director. John Eyre retired in 2001 and John Baxter ran the business thereafter.

In 2013 John Baxter bought the shares from Glynis Eyre and re-registered the business as Eyre and Baxter Limited. During the last 20 years much of the traditional business reduced and in 2019 it ceased trading, 103 years after its formation.

**Advanced Stamp & Plate Co.**

In 1984 with the help of John Eyre, Nigel and Richard Eyre (John’s sons) formed a new company - Advanced Stamp and Plate Company, based in Sheffield, with the view to produce rubber stamps for Eyre and Baxter (Stampcraft) Limited and sell to other trade outlets.

The company installed new technology for the production of stamps, using photo polymer and desk top publishing. This enabled faster production than their competitors who were struggling to introduce the new technology, facing strong opposition from the unions who were resisting the changes. As a result, the company witnessed strong growth and by the millennium registered a turnover in excess of £1 million and employed 18 people.

The company incorporated in 2001 and trades as ASAP Stamps Ltd.

After the death of Richard Eyre, Steve Turley became sales Director.

Holly Eyre, Nigel’s daughter joined the business in 2017.

The company continues to go from strength to strength, employing 24 staff by 2019 and operating from its purpose-built premises in Sheffield.

The Company has always been a strong supporter of the RSMG, joining in 1984. Nigel Eyre became a Director when the Guild incorporated in 2004 and was Vice President between 2004 and 2012. He served as President between 2012 and 2015 and remains a Director.

**Nigel Eyre’s story……….**

*In June 1984 I completed a Business Studies Degree at Sheffield Hallam University and was considering which career path to follow. I had exemptions in accountancy foundation and looked to follow that route until an opportunity to start my own business arose. My Father was a director of Eyre & Baxter (Stampcraft) Ltd. and, amongst selling other marking devices, factored rubber stamps. He believed there was a business opportunity to manufacture rubber stamps in Sheffield. I started to research the possibility with business plans, forecast and budgets put together. My brother Richard, had completed an engineering apprenticeship with GEC that summer and it became apparent the two of us could complement each other in the project. Richard investigated the production techniques available. In addition, my Mum Audrey, who had been a secretary at British Steel, could provide the required secretarial skills. The partnership of Advanced Stamp and Plate Company (ASAP) was formed on 1st September 1984.*

*We had applied for various grants and operated from an “Enterprise workshop” on Nursery Street in central Sheffield. The building was owned by Sheffield City Council and was actually the old Mortuary – our room was in fact where the Post Mortems were carried out and still had the “blood” drains running around the outside of the room! Not a place we liked working alone late at night. We had investigated the possibility of producing stamps with an APR polymer machine which arrived in early September. This was new stamp technology succeeding the traditional metal type production method. We factored the negative required and bought a “Heron” vulcanising press along with a Universal 4 phototypesetter. Orders were saved from Eyre and Baxter whilst we figured out how to produce an acceptable stamp. It took a month of testing to fine tune a product that was acceptable to take to market – many a late night was spent at the Morgue! Come October I started making the occasional sales visit to other trade outlets in Sheffield and the Business began to grow – we were offering a 48-hour turnaround (the quickest at the time) and a trade discount of 33.33%. In the first 12 months we turned over £70,000, and had only taken out of the business “Enterprise Allowance Wage” (£40 a week for Richard and I) and had subsequently repaid all loans.*

*The premises on Nursery Street were only temporary and after 24 months we moved to West Street, again in the centre of Sheffield, on a second floor – not ideal – it needed the help of my local football team to move the equipment over a weekend. Shortly afterwards we employed our first employee, Paul Kent. In 1991 I got married to Sally and Paul met my sister at my wedding reception. Within a couple of years, he had become my brother in law! Over the next 7 years we expanded and took on other staff including a Sales Rep, Steve Turley, Richard’s next-door neighbour. Steve started bringing in more business and won the Royal Mail contract in 1991. At the beginning of 1992 we began investigating the viability of building our own purpose-built factory instead of the rented accommodation on West Street. Land was found on Oak Street and a factory and office built. We moved to “Impression House” late 1992 – again a weekend move, without any loss of any production.*

*The business flourished over the next decade with the help of moving over to desk top publishing and providing a same day delivery service. In 2002 we bought Selecta Products when Jones Clifton went into liquidation. My Father, who had now retired, helped us organise the move of Selecta from Beccles to Sheffield and helped run the Company from a temporary Porta cabin on the premises. We hired a farmer’s barn for the stock whilst a warehouse was built.*

*Over the following years we made various acquisitions - Roger Needham, BJ Rubber Stamps, Eastbourne Rubber Stamps, Slingers (London) and Stampreo. Tragically my brother Richard died in 2010. The Staff rallied and the business continued. We incorporated in 2010 and Steve Turley became a shareholder and Director. In 2017 my daughter Holly finished a degree at Sheffield University and joined the business - she is currently learning the ropes. I am presently taking more of a back seat with a capable Office manager, Kelly Morewood and production manager Colin Mason running much of the day to day business.*

*The Business joined the Rubber Stamp Manufacturer’s Guild in 1984 and I have been an active member ever since, making lasting friends and associates. I have always been a keen supporter of the RSMG, I became a Director when the Guild incorporated in 2004 and was Vice president between 2004 and 2012. I was President between 2012 and 2015 and again vice President from 2017 - 2019. I remain a Director and I am proud of both my contribution and being part of the unique organisation. I’d like to thank my fellow Directors for their commitment helping make the organisation so special.*

*It has been a very enjoyable journey, not without hard work and ups and downs. I remember Gordon King (President of the RSMG in the 1990’s) saying the industry probably had 5 years viability left. Nearly 20 years on, we have seen many changes but the industry continues, albeit in a different structure.*

**Geoffery Betts’ story……..**

**Shorebridge Stamps**

*Alan Sandy, the ex-Managing Director of William Jones Clifton, set up Shorebridge Stamps in Bourne End, Buckinghamshire. Alan had acquired the rights to use Porelon and wanted to promote pre-inked stamps in preference to traditional rubber stamps. In 1984, I met Alan when we both lived in Norfolk, during the time that Alan was M.D. at William Jones Clifton.*

*As co-incidence would have it, I already owned a house in Bourne End so when Alan demonstrated the Porelon product to me, I was hooked and joined Shorebridge.*

*The company was already struggling by that stage and three months later it went into administration, but by that time, I had experienced some success with the product and had as they say “smelled the flowers”.*

*Alan sold the assets of the business to Boras Stamplefabrik, a Swedish company owned by Hans, Lara and Thomas Bengtsson.*

**Evermark Ltd.**

*1988 - I was appointed managing director of Shorebridge and I immediately changed the name to Evermark Ltd. Stewart Superior Inc. in America had an existing relationship with the Bengtssons in Sweden and they used the name Evermark for their pre-ink program in America.*

*Throughout my time at Shorebridge and later at Evermark, I worked with Terry Reader who later went on to join Dormy Ltd. working in sales for Sally Grey.*

*1992 - The Bengtsson’s sold the Evermark business to Johnson’s Wax. Subsequently in 1994, Johnson’s Wax sold the business to the Identity Group of Cookeville, Tennessee who had already acquired Porelon.*

*1994 - I left the business in November and Ewan Griffiths was appointed General Manager in my place.*

*After Identity Group acquired Mark C. Brown, Evermark was merged with MCB into the Hull based operation.*

**Stewart Superior (Europe)**

*Stewart Superior was already a large and well-respected company in the American stamp market, run by brothers Jack and Joe Donnelly. I started Stewart Superior (Europe) in November 1994 with the help of Joe Donnelly who ran the Stewart Superior office in Chicago. Joe did all the work with me to get the company up and running, with me owning a 33% stake in the business. Joe Donnelly later went on to become the Senator for the state of Indiana from 2012 to 2018.*

*Stewart Superior (Europe) was originally established to make stamps and to sell Stewart Superior products into Europe, but I quickly realised the competition from Austria was just too strong and that the future success for the business lay elsewhere. Gradually and over* *a period of time, the company withdrew from the stamp business to concentrate on new business opportunities, celebrating our 25th anniversary in 2019.*

**Supreme Rubber Stamp Company**

**Keith Hill’s story……….**

*In the early 1960’s I visited my friend Mervyn in Fairfax, Virginia. He had emigrated to America earlier - I was very impressed by the difference between the UK and the USA and that America held out a brighter future.*

*After several months of tedious contact with the American Embassy in London, I decided that the only way to speed up my entry to the USA would be by emigrating to Canada first and then travel to Washington D.C. after 6 months.*

*I had to leave my wife Pat in Toronto until I got all our paperwork sorted out in Washington.*

*The Immigration Service saw it in a somewhat different way and promptly took my passport off me. They informed me that until my application to change my status to Green Card holder was approved, I was not allowed to work anymore than 29 hours in a job. I took this to mean I could have more than one job and promptly secured three part time jobs. I worked as a maintenance man during the day, on checkout at a Safeway store in the evenings and as a cleaner at a block of offices and shops at Warwick Avenue at the weekends.*

*Eventually our Green Cards came through and Pat was allowed to come to Fairfax.*

*While working as the cleaner I had got to know Jim Kitts, the owner of Fairfax Rubber Stamp Company. They operated out of a three office / workshop space on the first floor of the building on Warwick Avenue. When I told him that Pat was coming down from Toronto, he said he was looking for someone to work in his business so that he and his wife could take more holidays in Florida. She started work the following week.*

*For my part I started working at Motorola in their Virginia office on an internal audit team. After about 12 months Motorola announced that the Virginia office was to close and all staff were offered a transfer to Chicago, something we did not want to do.*

*On several occasions, whilst working at Motorola, I had helped out at Fairfax Rubber Stamp Co when they were busy or the Kitts had gone off on holiday to Florida*

*Unfortunately, Jim Kitts had two heart attacks in quick succession which prompted him to tell Pat that he was going to sell the business and that she might be out of a job.*

*This announcement corresponded with that from Motorola and Pat and I agreed it would be beneficial to us both if we acquired the business. After some negotiation we bought the business.*

*Pat had already got the accounts sorted and had done some manufacturing and I quickly sorted out the typesetting. All the typesetting was done by hand from type cases containing all the letters, numbers and punctuation characters.*

*I soon doubled the turnover but this meant many hours of type composition and the replacement of all the separate lead type. It soon became apparent that I would have to speed up the typesetting process.*

*I had a friend in the UK who was a hot metal compositor at the Nottingham Evening Post, who, upon hearing about our new life in America, was desperate for him and his family to emigrate. I immediately sponsored him, and he and his family moved to Virginia shortly after.*

*Even before he got off the ship in New York I had got him a job at Vienna Typesetting Services in the next town to Fairfax. His new boss had been looking for someone skilled enough to run the business while he retired to the golf course. Louie, my friend, soon had Vienna Typesetting Services sorted and I was then able to buy my type already set as a hot metal slug which was then used to make the stamps.*

*When Mr. Kitts was running the business, he did a small amount of printing using a manual Gestetner duplicator. He was printing a couple of local business newsletters, about 500 copies of each. I was fascinated by this machine and tendered to print 2000 copies of the Fairfax Animal Welfare League newsletter. We printed the first issue and received a massive vote of thanks from the customer for doing such a wonderful job. They promptly increased the order to 5000 copies, once a month.*

*Word must have got around because soon we were printing so many newsletters that we were having trouble actually making rubber stamps. I invested in two fully electronic Gestetner duplicators, an early form of scanner and an IBM golf ball typewriter.*

*Now the printing side went ballistic. I started a new printing business, Hill Printing & Publishing in one of the shops on the ground floor of the building and bought an offset lithographic printing machine and employed a machine operator.*

*Pat, in the meantime, was still running Fairfax Rubber Stamp Co.*

*After about one year of rapid expansion, I moved the printing company to the basement area of Warwick Avenue. This was 10,000 sq. ft. in size and within two to three years had a staff of 56 employees, clerical and manual.*

*By this time, I had taken on a partner, a fiery Argentinian, Vic Hammerly, who brought another facet to our print portfolio. He was an expert in Web fed machines, producing multi-part sets of invoices etc. His expertise, and my machines and staff, soon saw another leap in production.*

*However, as in all things in life, a little rain must fall. The rain that fell in the Shenandoah mountains certainly was not a little. In fact, it turned into a massive surge of flood water that had made its way to Fairfax and the surrounding area. I was woken up by a phone call from the Fairfax Police Department to get me to go to Warwick Avenue as the low-lying basement and surrounding area was completely flooded. The damage to the building and to our equipment was heart breaking, and the cost of repair was something we could not get over. Both Vic and I tried our best to recover what we could, but our insurance company kept quoting “Act of God”.*

*A period of ill health followed and I decided to return to the UK.*

*The flood had pretty well wiped me out financially, so it was back to basics so far as a business was concerned. A decision had to be made, “What was I going to do?” Printing or Rubber Stamps?*

*A quick survey of printers in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire showed that there were about 300 printers from small one-man bands to some serious contenders – too much competition for a new start up. However, there was only one Rubber Stamp maker in Nottingham, a small one in the Lace Market area - decision made.*

*My brother Barry, a Research Technician in the Physics Department of Nottingham University had set up a part-time business manufacturing precision test gear for the aero-space industry. He had a substantial workshop attached to his house and it was from there that I started Supreme Rubber Stamp Co.*

*In Virginia I had all the contacts I needed to buy rubber stamp components. However, In England, I had no such suppliers. I had made an initial contact with the Rubber Stamp Manufacturers’ Guild to see if I could join the organization. It was my understanding that membership would be a gateway to approaching suppliers.*

*I had invited Brian Sykes of the Guild to come to my workshop to interview me regarding my suitability to become a member. The meeting was, I recall, rather short. On seeing that I did not have a vulcanizing press, Mr. Sykes informed me that membership would not be possible. He agreed however that if I got a vulcanizing press, then membership would follow.*

*Whilst in Virginia, I had traded with Jackson Rubber Stamp Supplies and this seemed like the only channel I could use to get a press and manufacturing supplies. A phone call to Jacksons ascertained that they had a table top press available and a couple of weeks later I landed at Chicago O’Hare airport and then drove to their premises. The table top press was a fairly basic machine, but it did the job of vulcanizing rubber. We had three presses at Fairfax Rubber Stamp Co. and I knew the machine had a small hydraulic car jack which lifted the bottom platen. I asked them to remove the jack to reduce the weight so that I could carry the press in an ex-military back pack.*

*Fortunately, in those days there was no limit on luggage, so I filled two large suitcases with wooden mounts, which came in strips, small handles, matrix boards and rubber. These items would keep us going until I found out where to buy my supplies.*

*Needless to say, the return journey was more of a marathon to get it all back home.*

*I asked my brother if he could make a press similar to the one that I had brought back, and he looked at me and rather quizzingly said, “I could make this with my eyes shut.” “Good”, I said, “make me five more”, which appeared a couple of weeks later.*

*My Father, who ran the Biology Department at the University, had extensive woodworking facilities and extra wooden mounts and handles were produced after hours.*

*When Brian Sykes came to see me next, he had to admit I did indeed have a vulcanizing press, six to be accurate.*

*I had already contracted the Long Eaton Advertiser to set all my type on their Intertype hot metal machines, and then the business really took off.*

*About a year passed and I was able to buy a parcel of land and had our first factory built. It was about 2000 sq. feet and I was able to buy two intertypes, a Ludlow and an Elrod, all hot metal machines.*

*We ran a daily delivery service using our van, which did away with using the post, greatly appreciated by our customers.*

*Three years later we were bursting at the seams, so we moved to a 4000 sq. ft. unit on a large industrial estate close to the M1 motorway.*

*Another three years passed and now I was wanting a custom-built factory to house all the facilities I needed. I worked with a local architect for several months designing and refining layouts until I knew it was right. I had been scouring the area for a suitable plot and eventually found the ideal location. The plot however, was big enough for my unit of 8000 sq. ft. another unit of a similar size and a smaller workshop unit of 1750 sq. ft.*

*Our builder built all the units, one of which I sold to him to house his new business, a tool hire depot.*

*We had by this time moved entirely to photo-typesetting using Apple computers and liquid polymer for the stamp dies.*

*Hard polymer was used for making matrix boards, and rubber for our newly formed craft stamp business.*

*Each year my wife Janice and I would travel to the USA to the American Rubber Stamp trade shows and it was at one of these shows we were approached by M & R Marking Systems who were looking for a UK distributor for their products.*

*This was a very happy relationship with M & R resulting in Supreme being voted Dealer of the Year in 1994.*

*In 2008 I underwent Chemotherapy and had a major operation for Cancer and in 2011 decided that at the age of 70 I needed to cut back a bit.*

*In 2012 I sold the factory and workshop unit and moved just the sales office staff and the accounts to a suite of offices at the Icon Business Centre while our production was done for us by Trodat. The company continued that way until 2019 when I sold the business to Trodat UK.*

**Norwich Rubber Stamps**

George Giggs’ journey to the world of rubber stamps began in 1919 when he was taken on as an apprentice compositor at the Bideford Gazette in North Devon. George remembers having to work late on Monday’s for the weekly paper to be ready for market day Tuesday. From hand setting, the paper gradually moved to Monotype machine setting which was the start of the ‘Hot metal’ age.

On completion of his apprenticeship, George had a brief spell at a print shop in Newport before moving to Belfast to work the nightshift for the Irish Times. They had six mechanical Linotype machines and operators, half a dozen compositors and a ‘Stone Man’ who made up the final pages of type. George started out by setting the Stocks and Shares and then progressed to setting display advertisements.

After just a couple of years in Belfast, George moved back to England and embarked on various roles at newspapers and print shops. Work was hard to find during the great depression of the early thirties but he eventually ended up in Norwich in 1936 as a foreman at General Printers Gibbs & Waller. His time there was brief and after an altercation with the notorious owner Mr Gibbs (no previous foreman had lasted more than a few months), George moved on to eventual stability at F.W. Harmer & Co. They were a wholesale clothing and uniform manufacturer for the Post Office, Fire Service and Armed Forces. At that time, they employed six hundred machinists and had an internal print department that amongst other things produced the catalogues twice a year, all typeset by hand. George’s job was to run the print department. Harmers was targeted by the German Luftwaffe and George was on fire duty the night the factory took a direct hit and became a raging inferno that razed it to the ground. George often reminisced that the German pilot must have returned home quite satisfied with his night’s work. “But they knew exactly what they were doing of course. Why did nobody realise that sewing a label onto the hundreds of thousands of military uniforms in use in various theatres of the war declaring that it was made by F.W. Harmer Ltd., Norwich might not have invited such an unfriendly visit from the Luftwaffe. All they needed was one captured pair of P.O.W.’s trousers or shorts to confirm the uniform’s origin. Just to think I was exempted from army service as I was needed back home to print the labels!”

George survived the war - just. In 1942 his home was bombed - George, together with his wife Stella and their five children, Tony, Faith, Joy, Christine and Angela (Roland their sixth child was born after the war) escaped serious injury by sheltering under the improvised indoor Morrison Shelter (basically the kitchen table) whilst the front of their house was blown away.

George managed the printing department at Harmers from 1937 - 1969 where he did all the buying of the stationery for the office staff. Among the items he would order were rubber stamps. In virtually all those years, the waiting time for a custom-made stamp was 3 - 4 weeks and 8 weeks for a special band stamp. At this time George was ordering from Richford’s in Snow Hill, London who were one of just a handful of companies nationwide that manufactured rubber stamps. George then realised (thanks to a leaflet from ASK Rubber stamps stating “We make our rubber stamps from printers’ type”) that got George thinking…

**George Giggs’ story…………**

*Now this got me thinking. At home in the shed in our back garden I had a little spare time printing business turning out small jobs such as business cards, wedding invitations and that sort of thing on a small cropper machine but more significantly I printed these using a variety of printers type I set up by hand in what is called a composing ‘stick’. So, if I had the type, all I would need to produce my own rubber stamps would be the equipment itself. Despite searching I could find no literature explaining the method of making a rubber stamp and nobody I asked had a clue either. It seemed to be one of the world’s greatest mysteries. As far as requesting the information from the stamp makers themselves it would have been easier to squeeze blood from a stone. It was a completely ‘closed book’. I don’t give up and it wasn’t long before I spotted an advert in the Exchange & Mart paper stating ‘rubber stamp making equipment for sale £80’. I had a pal with a car and he ran me down to London. It was a rundown little place and the seller was a Jewish gentleman. He had an old gas press capable of making up to one dozen stamps at a time. I could see the last stamp he made was only one because the type was still on the press. No wonder he was selling up! The press was the only thing I wanted and my friend took a number of ink pads to resell in his shop in Duke Street, Norwich.*

*Now that I had got the press and the type, where did I go from here? I had gas laid on at Waterloo Park Avenue so that was no problem. Richford’s was prepared to supply me with the rubber and plaster of Paris for making the mould. Plus, I had a garage in which to make the stamps.*

*After many frustrating weeks of unsuccessful attempts to produce a rubber stamp with the plaster of Paris exploding everywhere, I decided to ask Richford’s if they would show me around their factory. I expected a rebuff but was eventually told I could have a short visit. On arrival I was shown into the reception office and told to wait until Mr. John Richford was available. It felt like hours until a bell rang inside the factory and Mr. John Richford showed up. I asked him why he wasn’t answering letters I had sent him but he dismissed the question by saying he had so much correspondence he was unable to answer everything. The bell was for the workers morning break and all the equipment and presses were idle. No doubt he had timed his appearance for this work break. Fortunately, the presses were still hot and I was able to make a mental note of the temperature which was around 90 degrees. But apart from that I was not much wiser. There was just one Linotype machine and the rest was hand-set printers’ type that I already had.*

*A mechanic from Harmer’s joined me in the evenings and weekends and we got stuck in, hoping to make our first stamp. It was mostly trial and error and try this and try that. At times when we peered in to see how things were cooking lumps of plaster would come flying out and into our faces. As expected, the mechanic gave up on the project saying it was all a bit dangerous and that it was little wonder no one wanted to make a rubber stamp. There was no manufacturer at all in East Anglia. With a sigh and some regret, I decided to call it a day and stashed all the equipment under the bench.*

*About one year later I was informed there was now a matrix board available to take the place of the plaster of Paris and Richford’s was cutting the material to sizes to suit the gas presses. Now this was a massive step forward for me. The board was deep enough to soften under the heat for the type to mould and a signal for me to take the plunge and go it alone. I informed Harmer’s I was going into business on my own and handed in my notice. They could not believe it. I was like a part of the furniture there I suppose after thirty odd years of service. They asked me to stay on part time but I had to refuse. It was all or nothing as I was already fifty-nine years old. We started in January 1964 and I called the business Norwich Rubber Stamp Manufacturers.*

*My first job was to get out and visit all the big companies in the city with a price list. I also offered a free first-class postal delivery service which no other company in the country offered. The only big company who queried my prices were the Norwich Union Insurance Co. They told me my prices were too high. I later discovered because of the volume they ordered other stamp companies gave them a one third discount on retail price. Why didn’t they say? When Bally Shoe Company got wind of a rubber stamp manufacturer starting up in the city, the buyer walked miles looking for me, not expecting to find me perhaps in a back-garden location.*

*Business got off to a good start, mainly due I would say to my promise of a quick service. I needed help and as Roland hadn’t enjoyed his stint as an apprentice carpenter at the Coach Works, I suggested he might like to join me as an apprentice type setter in the rubber stamp trade. At least he didn’t have far to walk to work! I already had a lady doing my invoices and accounts who was eventually replaced by Mum. There were still teething troubles. We took a while to get to know the new matrix and for a while we weren’t turning out the perfect stamp every time. Eventually we got the hang of it and then we were off and running. We were now employing a couple of part time workers and I was now looking for larger premises.*

*The fish and chip shop at the top of Eade Road had closed and was now up for sale. It was only a short walk from our home in Waterloo Park Avenue. I got it for £500 leasehold. It was a bargain - it was in fact a 3-bedroom end terrace with a shop at front, driveway at the side leading to some old stables and a loft which we quickly converted to a workshop and store for our stock and materials. We purchased a bright red minivan and had a giant cut-out plywood rubber stamp attached to the metal roof rack. We used this for our express deliveries to our regular customers. Roland was usually the driver but confessed to being a bit embarrassed by the giant rubber stamp on top. And rather than take his girlfriend out on a date in it he opted for the bus. In 1967 when Roland married Georgie, they rented the house for a nominal sum until they had saved enough to buy a chalet bungalow of their own on the site of the old Firs Speedway stadium.*

*Moving the business away from home turned out to have a health benefit, a boost to my overall fitness and well-being. At the Avenue all I needed to do was take a few steps from the back door and I was inside the garage. My legs were beginning to play up a bit and would often ache and I wondered if this was down to not using them enough. Whilst at Harmer’s I had cycled to work and back every day of my life always riding up the almost vertical Stone Road without dismounting. When, as often I did, return home for a light mid-day meal, that doubled the distance so the move to Eade Road which entailed a brisk half mile walk four times every day soon paid dividends and within weeks the legs were back to normal again.*

*I also had a jobbing print shop nearby at the top of Magpie Road at St. Augustine’s Gates rented from the council. We gave it the name Magpie Printers. An ex apprentice of mine from Harmer’s, a chap named David Dare (everybody called him Dan Dare) came along and ran it. It produced our stationery and also our rubber stamp catalogues and did a brisk jobbing business in posters, handbills and office stationery. Roland eventually swapped rubber stamps at Eade Road for printing at Magpie Road and eventually I sold the business to him for a nominal price with Dan coming to the rubber stamps and Roland running Magpie Printers with a chap called Bob Horton for several years. Getting shot of the printing business was a good move really as it allowed me to give my full attention to the stamps.*

*By this time the rubber stamp operation was going from strength to strength. Two big customers of ours were H.M.S.O. (Her Majesty’s Stationery Office) and The Norwich Union and we were employing around twelve workers, mostly full time and it struck me that Tony (my eldest son) might be a useful acquisition to the business. He was a steady sort of chap, sensible and practical and I had a feeling he had ambition and wasn’t really content to spend the rest of his working life at the Coachworks. He came on board and I could see from the outset he had a lot of good ideas to improve our production methods. Sometimes there was perhaps a personality clash which led to friction between us but I could see clearly, he was going to be a valuable asset to the operation.*

*I enjoyed Saturday mornings at Eade Road because all of my local grandchildren were at one time or another employed in various Saturday morning duties - mostly cleaning, organising of stock, packing and other odd jobs. The eldest, usually one of Angela’s daughters Boo or Jenny Mathew looked after the shop at the front. Daniel Mathew, Joel and Matthew Gigg, Roland’s two boys shared various other duties. Apart from the pleasure of being in the company of my grandchildren for a few hours every week, it gave the children a chance to earn some much-needed pocket money. I thought the world of all of them really. All were good workers and well behaved.*

*Tony thought we should expand the operation by opening another branch in another town or city, one in which there was no stamp manufacturer. After looking around at various options we found premises in Lincoln on a small industrial estate. We installed a young Norwich chap and his wife to run the business with two Lincoln lads. The main business was rubber stamp manufacturing but they had a lot of space there and so we put in a couple of printing presses and they supplied all the Rubber stamp stationery and catalogues. I would drive up there once a week to supply them with stock and materials for the rubber stamp operation. My daughter Christine opened a branch In Cambridge in 1984 and as Roland was again at a loose end, he joined his sister Christine along with a lad called Kevin who we had trained up at Norwich. It was discovered that the Lincoln manager had succumbed to temptation and was operating his own printing business from within the rubber stamp premises. Tony was despatched there to give him and his wife instant dismissal. Roland at Cambridge was sent there to take charge of things until my daughter Faith’s son Bill was offered the opportunity to take over as manager. Roland went and found premises in Nottingham and opened a branch there. He had just married his third wife Marissa from the Philippines and she helped in the Nottingham shop and on the computer. Eventually after fourteen years and three children Roland took early retirement and left to start a new life in Thailand.*

**Stamps Direct**

1962 -George Gigg’s first experiments (assisted by youngest son Roland) with making rubber stamps in his garden shed were very nearly his last, as he survived some spectacular explosions whilst trying to master the art of creating plaster of paris moulds using an old gas fired press he had acquired for £80.

1963 -After too many near fatal explosions George replaced the plaster of paris system with matrix boards sourced from France.

1964 - Eade Road and the birth of Norwich Rubber Stamps.

George bought 111 Eade Road in Norwich, the former Chip Shop was to become the home of Norwich Rubber Stamps and later Stamps Direct for the next 49 years.

The building remained essentially an end terrace house with small extension for staff toilets and workshop out the back. Over the years every inch of space was utilized, even the space under the typesetter’s desks was pressed into action when more space had to be found to accommodate the new style self-inking stamps that started to appear in the late seventies. Over the years, as the business grew and adapted to modern technology Eade Road evolved too and through a combination of Heath Robinson modifications and eccentric wiring updates managed to keep the business going. In some ways Eade Road was possibly the secret of the business’s success, so much was crammed into such a confined area the process and the people were forced into working efficiently. Over the years all manner of production methods came and went, from hot metal to Laser, Eade Road saw them all. It was finally the need to accommodate more lasers whilst still maintaining the older but far from redundant vulcanizing presses that provided the impetus for the move to bigger premises in 2013.

1969 -Around about this time George’s eldest son Tony joined the business. Tony applied his practical skills to the process of stamp making and implemented some truly ingenious solutions for indexing rubber stamps that became closely guarded industry secrets that are still relevant today. Crucially, A4 sheets of rubber could now be indexed before they were cut into individual stamps, a big labour saving at the time. Tony also introduced a new Perspex mounting system that, carrying on in the family tradition was developed in his own garden shed. Tony continued to produce Perspex mounts well into his eighties and production only really stopped just a few months before his death at the age of 88 in 2019.

1970 -During the 1970’s, Ludlow typesetting machines were purchased and 6 vulcanizing presses were acquired for a bargain £10 each from a closing down sale at a local printing company. The Ludlow machines are long gone, but Stamps Direct kept hold of the presses for many years as they still had a role, especially for large quantity orders. The last vulcanizing press left for the scrap yard in 2019.

**Branches**

George expanded the business by opening branches in Lincoln, Cambridge and Nottingham. George and Tony rented an industrial unit and the Lincoln branch opened in 1978. The operation was run by a manager from Norwich, the unit was quite large and in the early days they also provided a printing service. Bill Greenfield, George’s grandson later took charge of Lincoln and is still there at their current premises just outside Lincoln city centre. Roland and his sister Christine set up another branch in Cambridge in 1984, Roland then moved on to start yet another branch in Nottingham, this branch is no longer operating. George regularly visited the branches loading up his car with stock and driving to Lincoln, Cambridge or Nottingham well into his eighties.

**George’s Retirement**

George retired in 1989 at the age of 84. Once he was content the branches were all established and he had seen the first computers introduced into the business, he was happy to retire. The transformation to retirement was instant, George left his desk on Friday afternoon and never set foot in Eade Road again - he began a new life devoted to his passions of gardening and cooking. George had given no thought to his financial situation and embarked on his retirement with no pension whatsoever. Luckily for George he took the financial advice of Robert, who with tremendous foresight arranged an annuity which paid George handsomely for many years longer than any insurance company could have predicted. George eventually passed away in 2008 at the age of 103.

Throughout his time at Norwich Rubber Stamps, George was a stickler for detail and never ever compromised on quality - his pursuit for perfection showed no bounds. The fights he had with the typesetters were legendary as were, on occasion the disputes he had with customers and travelling salesmen. George did not tolerate timewasters. As an incentive for Debbie, the new girl (who continued to work for Stamps Direct for 44 years) he rewarded her with a shilling for every mistake she spotted. George’s passion for perfection rubbed off on Debbie as over 40 years later she could still be found checking every stamp she packed, still hoping no doubt to be rewarded by a shilling.

**Stamps Direct – The Modern Era**

Stamps Direct continued through the major technological changes, some redundancies resulted when the big switch over to computer typesetting took place in the 1980’s and there were some uncertain times when the Stationery Office contract was lost, but on the whole Stamps Direct always managed to find new customers and remained busy. A policy of Stamps Direct was never to rush into new technology. In fact, they hesitated for so long over buying a laser that Trotec agreed to loan them one for as long as they wished. It was a shrewd move by Trotec as Stamps Direct subsequently bought five. Self-Inking stamps now dominate the rubber stamp industry and this would be no surprise to George, as he predicted as much when he first saw the early Trodat Printys in the seventies.

Stamps Direct now import self-inking stamps by the container load from their Taiwanese partners Shiny. Following George’s retirement, the company was ably led by his eldest son Tony, and then Robert, who implemented some astute financial planning during a period of uncertainty. Christine looked after Cambridge and Roland finally settled in Nottingham. All those have now moved on or retired and the company is now headed by David in Norwich and Bill in Lincoln. The biggest change in recent years was the move of the Norwich branch to Mason Road in January 2013. A very big decision to leave Eade Road the birthplace and home of Rubber Stamps for nearly 50 years was taken and the company has not looked back since.

Tony Gigg passed away at his home on 3rd September 2019 after a period of illness.

**Colin Cousins story………**

*My exposure to the rubber stamp industry started with Norwich Rubber Stamps at very young age.*

*Potentially I hold the title as being the youngest person to spend day-after-day in a rubber stamp mount making facility, a title I can’t imagine many would bother to wrestle from me!

It actually all started a few years before I was born. My mother had become friends with a lady called Violet Gigg outside the school gates at Barford Primary School. Violet was dropping her son David at the gates and my mother was there with my brother Kevin and sister Hayley. Violet and my mother became friends (as did David and Kevin). Violet mentioned to mum that her husband Tony had established his own business based at home producing acrylic mounts for his father’s newly formed rubber stamp business (Norwich Rubber Stamps) and was looking for someone to help with production.*

*After some brief training, Mum soon found herself drilling and threading holes in acrylic mounts and polishing the cut edges using some kind of soap and an electric buffing wheel.*

*All was going well and the stamp business was thriving. Then mum announced in 1972 that she was expecting me and would unfortunately have to stop working until I started school. Tony was very disappointed to be losing his hard worker and offered mum the option of bringing me to work with her when she was ready. So, within a few short months of my birth in March 1973 mum strapped me to the back of her bike and ‘we’ cycled the couple of miles to the ‘stamp shed’.*

*Securely sat in a pushchair, I was positioned in the corner of a small brick-built shed to spend my days watching Mum producing mount after mount, day after day. Acrylic dust made a great place for me to play, it was like snow, but only slightly more abrasive and less easy to form into balls or men! But it was dry and ideal for burying things - I’m sure I lost many Matchbox cars in the dust.*

*Violet would bring mum a cup of tea every morning and it was on one such visit to the shed that Violet witnessed an all too frequent occurrence of an acrylic mount escaping mum’s grip from the buffing wheel and flying across the shed. These mounts would and did shoot off in any direction and I believe many headed my way, though luckily, I’m told none amazingly made contact with my face! Violet was quite distressed by this and asked Mum if she could take me into the safety of her house whenever mum was buffing the mounts.*

*For the next few years I spent my mornings in the shed and the afternoon when it was buffing time in the danger-free environment of Violet’s house. The added bonus to this was I got to play with David’s toys and enjoyed many trips to the shops with Aunty Vi and her mother.*

*Wind the hands of the clock forward a few years (12 to be exact) and Tony was looking for a lad to help mow the lawns etc. Mum immediately despatched me off on my bike in the direction of Tony and Vi’s where I would push the mower around the garden, orchard and the many paths that weaved around the grounds. For the winter months I would fill the coal scuttle, get the logs in and clean cars.*

*For the mount making business, Tony would buy off-cuts and rejected pieces of acrylic. One such delivery of acrylic contained hundreds of pieces of brown smoke acrylic with “REJECT” written across in black marker pen. I spent many hours in a cold garage with meth-soaked gloves removing the pen markings.*

*A few months into the winter and Tony re-introduced me to the shed that I once sat in as a baby. A few lessons in drilling and threading and I was up and running. The buffing wheel and soap had been replaced with a more dangerous flame-thrower and Tony quickly put his trust in me with the job of refilling the flame-thrower’s Methyl ethyl ketone tank - my paid employment in the world of rubber stamps had truly begun.*

*Summer holidays of 1987 brought more hours work in the garden and the opportunity to help with the production of the stamps at the main site in Norwich. I remember my first day at Eade Road very well. Tony would always start early (7.30am) and as I couldn’t get myself to Norwich under my own steam, I would cycle to Tony’s for a lift. When we arrived, Tony gave me a brief tour and then set me up with an assembly job, which I quite enjoyed and despite listening to Terry Wogan on Radio 2 the days went quite quickly.*

*Tony had told me before I started that the “men” at work could be quite unpleasant and suggested I should try to avoid them, or at best ignore them. As a quiet and shy 14-year-old the option of avoiding them was more appealing than trying to ignore them. So, as I was starting at 7.30am I could quickly head up the stairs of the ‘converted’ terrace house to the assembly room and sit there all day whilst the unknown and quite petrifying world of rubber stamp production went on below me.*

*Several weeks later I was joined by a girl called Joanne. She actually lived next door to me and her mother was working for Norwich Rubber Stamps too. Joanne’s mum was now my transport to and from work most days and I remember once asking Joanne where the toilets were. Joanne immediately repeated the question in astonishment not quite believing I’d been working there for six weeks and hadn’t been to the toilet. I didn’t like to admit I was just simply too scared to face the blood-curdling men and would rather hold it in all day!*

*During one of the journeys back home with Tony, he mentioned that the business was undergoing some major changes and the following year they hoped to invest into computers. Tony said that computers would be the next big thing for businesses and suggested I spent as much time as possible at school using them to gain experience for when I entered the big wide world and a job might even become available at Norwich Rubber Stamps when I left school the year after next (1989).*

*Over the next year or so I continued to mow lawns, clean rejected pieces of acrylic, drill, thread and polish mounts and take hours working at Norwich whenever possible. When it was time for my schooling to end, I was (with the help of my mother) looking for the next stage in life. Job offers came from book-wholesalers, printers, window manufacturers and a place at the City College was amongst my options. Then Tony sent a message via my mother offering me a full-time job at Norwich.*

*I had decided to narrow my options to two. The book-wholesalers, who gave a good presentation and felt a nice place to work with potential to progress and Norwich Rubber Stamps. The scary men had now left and set-up their own stamp making business with their combined redundancies (ironically at a unit near where Stamps Direct is located today).*

*After discussing the options with my brother (who worked at the Cambridge office), my mother and my Uncle Ken who I respected greatly in life and business, I took the stamp route.*

*Nearly 31 years later I haven’t looked back. Over the years, opportunities came to learn new roles and with a change of direction some 16 years ago I was offered a managerial position.*

*Now at the age of 46 and with a potentially (and god willing) at least a further 21 years left before I receive the state pension, I’d be more than happy to see my days out in an industry that’s served me so well.*

*I was appointed President of the RSMG in 2018, a role I continue to serve at the time of writing.*

**British Rubber Stamps**

**Gordon Kings’ story………… (posthumously)**

Gordon came to rubber stamps relatively late in life. In his younger years, he was a keen climber, cyclist and hockey player and performed in concert parties, singing, dancing and playing the banjo. By the time the rubber stamp years came around, he was a qualified football referee and lifetime chairman of a local junior football league. He played the piano, was a keen gardener, loved travelling, good food and wine and had possibly the world’s largest collection of obscure liqueurs - you knew you’d done something right if you were ever offered a glass of his much-loved strawberry brandy from the Azores.

He also liked a party - any party. When the children were young, he laid on the biggest and best bonfire parties every November (despite the fact that he’d lost one eye in a firework accident as a child). In later years he organised fund-raising discos for the local primary school and revelled in the DJ role. The King Disco Mix cassette is still treasured by his wife Anne. And if you knew him in the 1970s, you’ll know he had all the Travolta moves down pat, after he and his son signed up for Saturday Night Fever dancing classes!

 In the mid-1970s, Gordon decided he wanted to become his own boss and build up a business. When he started looking round for a going concern to buy, he came across F.H. Greenhalgh, a family-run Rubber Stamp Manufacturer, which Mrs. Greenhalgh was selling after the death of her husband. However, she wasn’t willing to sell it to just anyone, and wanted to meet the whole family first before making her decision. Gordon’s wife and the three children were duly bundled into the car and taken to her house. They were all on their best behaviour and passed muster – Mrs. Greenhalgh declared him to have a lovely family and allowed him to buy the company; £500 later, it was his.

It has to be said his wife and the kids weren’t quite so thrilled when they first saw his purchase - horrified is probably a better description of their reaction when they first walked into the premises - a ramshackle, dilapidated old building filled with decades of dirt and dust. Clearly, he had the vision the rest of the family were lacking! In subsequent years, he built up the business into a thriving concern, not only gradually taking on more staff and moving to bigger premises but acquiring similar firms in Birmingham and London.

Gordon joined the RSMG in the 1980’s and played an active role as it captured his imagination. In 1989 he became president, a position he held for 11 years and one of which he was immensely proud. He was particularly keen to encourage greater links between Guild members and to promote co-operation with the wider rubber stamp manufacturing world. His outlook was always very international.

He started EMDEC (European Marking Device & Exhibition Conference), which first took place in London in 1992. Nice, Amsterdam, Budapest, Prague, Krakow and others followed. The success of the exhibitions helped to significantly boost Guild funds over these years andinternationally, Gordon became one of the most respected men in our industry. The Guild still benefits from this legacy today.

Gordon was appointed International Director at IMIA (International Marking & Identification Association) and contributed articles to MIM Europe, tirelessly working hard to raise the profile of the Guild, its members and the rubber stamp industry as a whole.

Gordon had to give up his role as President of the Guild in 2000 when his health deteriorated. It was a sad occasion for him, but it didn’t lessen the pride, happiness and satisfaction he’d taken in the role. He was the second longest serving President of the RSMG.

In 2014, Gordon was posthumously awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award, presented to his widow Anne by President Nigel Eyre who said “there has never been a more worthy recipient in terms of his commitment, time and energy given to the Guild”.

**August Engraving**

August Engraving was a Dublin based, primarily engraving company situated on Burgh Quay to the side of the O’Connell Bridge on the River Liffey. The company which also made rubber stamps was owned by Doug Potten, whose parent company Masson Seeley was based in Downham Market, Norfolk where Doug lived and worked.

The company was managed in the early years by Denis Baldwin, a Masson Seeley employee who had been sent to Dublin on two-year secondment. Following Denis’s relocation back to Norfolk and after a short and unsuccessful period under new management, Tony Byrne was appointed General Manager, leaving production at the age of twenty-two. The company grew rapidly and prospered under Tony’s leadership with greater emphasis on rubber stamp production.

1966 - Tony Byrne was appointed Managing Director.

1968 - Tony Byrne bought the company from Doug Potten on 19th September.

2000 - August Engraving left Burgh Quay to move to a new purpose-built factory unit in Clondalkin, Dublin.

Tony’s daughter Simone joined the company in sales where she worked until her marriage and motherhood. Tony’s sons Geoff and Andy both joined the company in production and sales roles.

Over the years, Tony travelled extensively across Europe and the United States seeking new products, new production methods and equipment. Along the way he met and made many friends in the international stamp industry.

Tony now takes more of a back-seat role in the day to day running of the company, but he still goes into his office most days and involves himself in all the major decisions on the future direction of the business.

**Trodat** - (Austria)

1888 - Franz Just was born in Hermanitz, Sudetanland.

Trodat corporate group may never have existed if Franz Just had found a job in agriculture in his home town on Hermanitz, but even his father, periodically the mayor of the small town in Sudetenland could not prevent Franz from moving to Vienna in search of work. In Vienna, Franz met and fell in love with Hermine, a sweet girl from Stockerau and the couple were married in 1908.

1912 - The Trodat story began in Vienna in 1912, where Franz Just and his wife Hermine made stamp colours in their kitchen at home and the business started to grow quickly. Franz employed a man named Wilhelm Simon as his assistant and an apprentice named Leopold Volker who stayed with the company until his retirement. These were the people who started to make the stamps, laying the foundations for what later became the Trodat corporate group. His son Herbert was born during the start-up phase of the business, but during WWI, Franz and Wilhelm were called up for military service, leaving Hermine and the apprentice Leopold to continue with the business until the war ended.

1918 - After the war, Franz and Leopold returned home and Franz had to virtually start from scratch again., but so did the entire country. Franz and Hermine’s second son Walter, was born in 1921 and the company relocated to new premises on the Wahringer Gurtel, with the family living above the shop.

1939 - Walter Just, aged 18 years was called up for military service during WWII, but he did not like “the many fools” he met in the military. When he saw how stupid many of the people who gave the commands were, he said “my subservience is over”. He had to obey the orders however, and served in the Balkan campaign and then in Russia where the armed forces invaded with three million soldiers (153 divisions) on June 22nd, 1941. Walter and his comrades faced an uncertain future. On 3rd October 1941 while travelling in a radio car in Kiev, Walter and his comrades came under attack from Russian artillery fire. When a fragmentation grenade exploded less than 10 metres from him, Walter suffered a blow to his left shoulder which left his arm badly lacerated. Rescued and taken to a military hospital, Walter woke up the following day at the age of 20 to realise that his arm had gone.

1944 - After the end of the war and successfully completing World Trade studies, as a brand-new graduate, Walter entered his father’s company which was henceforth called Franz Just & Sohne’s. His first task was to try to secure the large number of date and number stamps which had been produced in large quantities and hidden in a room in the small village of Kirchberg an der Pielach. Walter found the goods safely locked away, untouched and transported them back to the business in a three-wheeled motorised delivery van, with the help of a young woman named Liselotte Krahultz, a girl he had met before the war at dance school. They fell in love and were married in 1944.

1947 - A date hand stamp named “TRODAT” was created. It was the combination of the two words TROlitul” (an early plastic material) and “DATe stamp”.

1951 - The company relocated from Vienna to Wels.

1960 - The successful product was registered as a product brand.

1968 - The company “Franz Just & Sohne” was renamed after its’ product: TRODAT.

1976 - The foundation of today’s Trodat was laid. The Printy, the first self-inking stamp made from plastic was launched and revolutionised the stamp industry. Self-inkers made of metal had already existed for a few decades at this time, but the innovation of Trodat was to translate the working principle of a self-inker into plastic, enabling users to benefit from the comfort of using a light weight self-inker at an affordable cost. The size 11 “Vienna Pocket Stamp” served as the blueprint for the new Printy which soon became one of the most popular stamps sold worldwide, creating a new market segment in the category.

1996 - The “Office Professional Line” was launched, superseded in 2017 by the “New Professional 4.0 Line”.

**COLOP** - (Austria)

1980 - COLOP was founded by Karl Skopek, a trained toolmaker and constructor. Karl started working as a sole trader on a farm in a small village close to Wels, producing a self-inking line.

Karl’s friend Paul Loos was a shareholder in the business from the very beginning.

Supported by his wife Friederike, Karl’s daughter, Sabine Koschika became his first employee in 1982, joined shortly afterwards by his son-in-law Gerhard Koschka.

1981 - Production of a self-inking stamp line started at a site near Wels.

Bob Schmidt – COSCO in Chicago, USA and Wirth & Goffi in Milan, Italy were appointed the first distributors for COLOP’s overseas expansion.

1982 - Ernst Faber joins COLOP as General Manager.

1984 - COLOP moved to a new facility in Wels, with further expansion over following years to successfully launch sales activities worldwide.

1986 - Distribution in Germany

1991 - Ernst Faber appointed Joint Managing Director and Gerhard Koschka became Plant Manager.

Distribution in France

1992 - Ernst Hable and his company Hanova Industrieholding GesmbH, acquired 50% of the shares held by Karl Skopek and Paul Loos.

1993 - Distribution in the Slovak Republic

Distribution in the Czech Republic

2000 - Distribution on Romania

2001 - Roland Schwarz joined COLOP as Export Manager taking responsibility for the UK market.

2005 - Karl Skopek died on 24th June aged just 60 after a long-term illness. His children Sabine Koschka, Doris Skopek-Stogner and Christoph Skopek continue to work for the company. Ernst Faber is left as the sole Managing Director.

2006 - Franz Ratzenberger appointed Sales Director following the retirement of long-term Sales Director, Werner Titz.

COLOP acquired UniGraphics, Sweden and its UK subsidiary Mark C. Brown, Hull

2008 – COLOP accredited with ISO 14001 (fully integrated environmental system)

2008 - COLOP introduce the “Green Line” range of environmentally friendly self-inking stamps, predominantly manufactured from minimum 75% and 80% recycled plastic, significantly reducing CO2 emissions

2009 - COLOP acquired William Jones Clifton, Birmingham

2010 - COLOP introduce a “Microban” range of self-inking stamps to provide antibacterial protection, inhibiting the growth of harmful bacteria and safeguarding the stamp user.

2011 - COLOP launch a range of “Liquid Wood” self-inking stamps. Specifically, a bio-plastic made predominantly from lignin. “Liquid Wood is 100% biodegradable with a very small CO2 footprint.

2013 - A second production facility was opened in Borovary (CZ)

The merged companies, William Jones Clifton and Mark C. Brown were re-branded to become “COLOP UK”, led by Managing Director, Kiran Mistry.

COLOP, Austria now produce more than 200 regular products that amount to a total of 12,000 product variations, resulting from the numerous languages where stamping devices are made (48 language and text variations, plus differing date chronologies). It also includes component colour variations demanded by worldwide consumers.

COLOP employ more than 220 members of staff in Austria and more than 400 employees within the COLOP Group.

COLOP supply more than 120 export markets (export share 98%).

2019 - COLOP launch “e-Mark”, a fully integrated and programmable, four colour print, hand-held marking device.

COLOP UK moved to a new purpose-built facility in Birmingham.

**Ludwig Ltd.**

Originally founded by Armin Ludwig, A. Ludwig & Sons Ltd. was an import and distribution business, originally founded in 1934.

Ludwig Ltd. was started in 1985 by H.C. Ludwig after the closure of the earlier business founded by his father.

It is believed by Chris Ludwig that Armin started the original REINER distribution in the U.K. (Chris was told that the original contract was written in French, REINER’s factory being in territory occupied by France after WWI).

After WWII, H.C. Ludwig and his brother P.A. Ludwig left their military war service (H.C. was in the RAF) and joined their elderly father to re-build his business (importing from central Europe having been very tricky during WWII).

The business became UK distributor for the French specialist artists’ paper manufacturer Canson & Montgolfier (inventors of the hot air balloon) - Dutch artists and colour makers Talons - and the German pen and pencil makers Swan-Stabilo, amongst others. In 1947 they added the new Trodat rubber stamp range to their portfolio alongside the REINER numbering equipment range.

The company grew steadily over the decades working with the member companies of the RSMG as well as supplying the stationery trade in general, largely through the wholesale stationery businesses Spicers, John Heath, Neville & Gladstone and Kingfield.

In the late 1970’s & early 1980’s the company was heavily involved in the launch of the “Printy”, including a video featuring an Austrian athlete (weightlifter or wrestler) using a Printy all day in a public square in Vienna and a UK TV advertising campaign for the Printy featuring a voiceover by Willie Rushton.

In 1985 the Ludwig brothers went their separate ways (they only met again in 2006 just before H.C. died). The company had floundered at that time due to recession, but H.C. had managed to secure the backing of REINER and Trodat among other companies to re-start his business. Trodat brokered a deal between H.C. and John Richford (Richford’s) to have Richford’s as a minority partner in order to secure financial stability. This partnership was maintained until 2000.

The restarted business thrived through hard work, supplying the wider stationery trade through the wholesale channel (winning Spicer’s “Supplier of the Year” award in their category 5 times in 10 years). Contracts were also won to supply the Post Office with a metal self-inking security date stamp, plus replacement pads, a piece of business that kept many people busy for a long period.

In 2001 Trodat decided to move their distribution to Dormy, who they had recently acquired.

Ludwig Ltd. soon announced that they had been appointed UK distributor for COLOP, Austria and through much hard work, managed to rebuild the 45% hole in their turnover within one year by selling to stamp manufacturers, large and small, a new customer base at that time.

During the following years, the company maintained a good level of growth for the COLOP and REINER brands, including a contract to supply over 100,000 pieces of a COLOP printer in a single year. They also began the distribution of REINER’s Jet-Stamp inkjet stamping range to a variety of customers, including special versions for printing codes on farm eggs and printing on to non-porous surfaces such as plastics and metals.

Following the financial crash of 2008, the erosion of margins experienced throughout the stationery trade made the business increasingly less viable, resulting in the closure of the company in June 2012.

**Identity Group** - USA

The following is a word by word history of Identity Group’s Pre-Inked Stamp business written by Cindy Chaffin – Identity Group’s Senior Executive Administrator. The article was written a few years earlier, but the facts are still correct.

**Cindy Chaffins’ story…………**

***Part I – The beginning……The Johnson Wax Era***

*In the beginning……*

*It all began with wax. Yes, wax, because in the beginning, Identity Group was a division of S.C. Johnson Wax Company out of Racine, Wisconsin. During the 1950’s, Johnson Wax was interested in entering new markets with products like mascara, lipstick, and show polish, etc. Some of the company’s purchasing staff went to a new trade show, and they saw a product that utilized a new technology that showed possibilities. The product was called “Perma-Stamp”, and it was being demonstrated by the inventors whose last names were Leeds and Levy. Their product was patented with what became known as the Leeds patent.*

*Perma-Stamp was a new type of rubber stamp that did not need an ink pad. What the Johnson Wax team saw was a display that contained numerous stock stamp titles made with this pad-free technology. (One of these displays still exists at Identity Group’s Cookeville Campus, and the stamps still work after 50 years!). One of the staff members convinced Johnson Wax management to pursue the product for its technology, and Johnson Wax bought out Leeds and Levy’s product entirely in the late 1950’s. They contracted Harry Leeds to continue with the development, but after a period of time, he left Johnson Wax development chemists on their own.*

*The Perma-Stamp product, which was marketed as a pre-inked stamp, was made with ink and nylon that when vulcanized (or baked) would form a structure of micropores that held the ink until released when stamped on paper. Johnson Wax needed to come up with a name for its new division, so it took a contraction for “pores” and “nylon” which suggested the product’s composition and strength characteristics and came up with the name Porelon. This was not only the company’s first name it was also the name of the material used to make the pre-inked stamp dies. (Today, the material is called premix or gel rather than Porelon, although the company name still exists). The new company was formed in January, 1973, and it moved to Cookeville, Tennessee in April, 1974, in Identity Group’s present Cookeville Campus.*

*Porelon licensed approximately 40 rubber stamp manufacturers in North America to produce and market the Perma-Stamp products initially. Eventually, licensees were added in overseas countries such as Europe, Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia, and India.*

*In addition to Perma-Stamp, Porelon also utilized the original technology to develop inked rollers that could be used in calculators, cash registers, and other equipment for marking on paper, lumber, and other materials. Another key product line for their pre-ink technology was fingerprint pads.*

*In the mid 1980’s Johnson Wax divested itself of Porelon as well as other divisions that did not compliment their core product lines.*

***Part II – The Johnson Wax Worldwide Era, And Addition of Microfoam, Trident, Swedpoint Stamps, and U.S. Stamps.***

*Our last article ended in the mid-1980’s when Johnson Wax divested itself of Porelon, and we became part of the corporate identity known as Johnson Worldwide Associates. At that time, Porelon was divided into two business segments: (1) ink rolls and ink technologies, and (2) hand stamps.*

***Ink Rolls and Ink Technologies***

*While Porelon was expanding its licensing program for Perma-Stamp on a worldwide basis, it was also expanding its customer base worldwide for its ink rolls and ink technology products. Speciality inks, lumber marking rolls, fingerprint pads, and a variety of other inked and un-inked structures were developed and produced here in Cookeville for worldwide distribution. In addition, Porelon expanded its product line to include small ink rolls for calculators and cash registers that it did not make. Rather, those products were either produced at Microfoam in Utica, NY or imported from Japan, then packaged with the Porelon brand. Customers for these smaller rolls were originally office supply wholesalers such as United Stationers and S.P.Richards, who in turn sold to small office supply dealers. Eventually, Porelon began selling to Office Club, an office supply superstore chain on the west coast \*that eventually merged with Office Depot on the east coast).*

*The problems with importing components from Japan were long lead times, large minimum order requirements, no quality control, and high importing costs. To resolve these issues in the late 1980’s Johnson Worldwide Associates acquired Microfoam. It became a sister company to Porelon, and it remained in Utica where it still exists today. Porelon no longer purchased these small ink rolls from Japan. Now they could control their own destiny and sell a U.S.-made product in the process.*

*Our R&D Department also developed an ink roller to re-ink ribbons in various printers to extend the ribbon’s life, thereby offering the companies that used them significant savings in man hours and dollars. The brand that we made for J.C. Penny as well as some other less known customers to use on their Printronix printers was called Ribbon Saver, and its claim to fame was that one of our Ribbon Saver rolls saved nine ribbons. We not only made the re-inking rollers, but also the brackets that made them fit into the printers.*

*We also made another brand of ribbon re inkers called First Edition. This brand was used in printers made by IBM and Genicom to name a couple. Today we sell ribbon re-inkers to companies such as Okidata and California Ribbon.*

*In addition to ribbon re-inkers, R&D also developed an ink roll that printed bar codes directly onto corrugated cartons on a packaging line. This eliminated the need for companies to keep multiple cartons in inventory with various bar codes; rather, they could print them on an as-needed basis with this new ink roll technology. We also sold the re-inkers to Lincoln Logo for national distribution.*

*Also, in the late 1980’s we acquired an ink jet printer manufacturer known as Trident. Porelon developed a division for developing ink jet inks and systems to be used with Trident ink jet printers for commercial applications. Although Trident was sold a few years later, we continued to make inks for their ink jets for a short time.*

***Hand Stamps***

*In addition to its worldwide licensing agreements for Perma-Stamp, a reciprocal agreement was made with one of its licensees located in Boras, Sweden – Swedpoint Stamps. In addition to being a stamp manufacturer, Swedpoint Stamps produced plastic injection moulded parts, including stamp handles (called mounts).*

*Swedpoint began producing the new look of Perma-Stamp, which would now have an orange triangular knob on top with a black base and dust cover. This new look would be introduced to all Perma-Stamp licensees worldwide, and it is still the look of Perma-Stamp today in many of those countries (including the U.S.). This was also the first pre-inked stamp that was adjustable for darker or lighter impressions and the adjustment wheel on the mount was patented. The reciprocal agreement made Swedpoint Stamps the sole distributor of Porelon premix/gel in Europe, and it made Porelon the sole distributor of Perma-Stamp mounts in North America.*

*Although there were over 40 Perma-Stamp licensees marketing pre-inked stamps directly to businesses and consumers, Porelon knew there were still many consumers who were not aware of the product and they had to find a way to market them. It realized that there was a great opportunity to expand by marketing through office supply dealers, thus a new program was launched. The new brand name was Echo, and the product looked similar to Perma-Stamp as it utilized the same black base and dust cover but had a royal blue square knob on top. It was also produced by Swedpoint Stamps, and it was primarily marketed in North America by Porelon and its North American licensees.*

*In some cities, current Perma-Stamp licensees added Echo to their marketing efforts, and they hired a separate sales force to call on dealers as opposed to businesses and consumers. In other cities where there wasn’t a Perma-Stamp presence, Porelon licensed new manufacturers to market and make Echo. By the latter part of the 1980’s, Porelon had over 100 rubber stamp makers licensed to produce either Perma-Stamp and/or Echo Pre-Inked Stamps. The company decided to enter into an even closer arrangement with Swedpoint Stamps, and ultimately made a significant investment into the company to formalize the partnership and gained controlling interest. Today, Swedpoint Stamps is known as UniGraphics, but Identity Group no longer owns any interest in it.*

*While Porelon’s hand stamp group was busy setting up Echo licensees, competitors came onto the scene. One of the fiercest had also developed a dealer program similar to Echo, and their pre-inked stamp was very similar to both Perma-Stamp and Echo. In fact, their mounts were also made by Swedpoint Stamps. The knob was a beige rectangular shape, and the base and dust cover were brown. Their brand name: Stamp-Ever. Their company name: U.S. Business Stamp. The company was headquartered in Oxnard, California, and it set up Stamp-Ever licensees not only in cities where we did not have one, but also in cities where we did. In 1989, Johnson Worldwide Associates acquired U.S. Business Stamp and merged it with Porelon’s hand stamp group. The combined companies now had a total of 200 licensees making Perma-Stamp, Echo, and Stamp-Ever Pre-Inked Stamps.*

*The combined U.S. Business Stamp/Porelon hand stamp group entity became known as U.S. Stamp, and it was run as a separate sister company to Porelon. Headquarters for U.S. Stamp remained in California for a time, and the personnel from Porelon that supported the hand stamp group remained in Cookeville but became U.S. Stamp employees and reported to the management team in California. In fact, the entire Cookeville U.S. Stamp operation was moved into a separate building down the street from Porelon. The culture of the company as they had known it under Johnson Wax and Johnson Worldwide Associates influence was about to change forever.*

**UniGraphics** - Sweden

1934 - The story starts with the founding of Boras Stampelfabrik by Algot Bengtsson. Algot bought the NCR-Stamp technology from the USA and started to replace the traditional rubber stamp with the (microporous rubber) pre-inked stamp with great success.

1973 - Stamplar & Gravyrer (S&G) was founded by two former employees from Boras Stampelfabrik, Per-Arne Carlsson and Bengt Darhult. Through their connection to Porelon in Tennessee, the company brought the Porelon Gel technology to Sweden, invented their own pre-ink stamp mounts called; Perma Stamp, Point Stamp and Delta Stamp with great success. Using the company name Swedpoint Stamps, the company acted to promote and sell the Perma-Stamp concept worldwide.

1985 - Swedpoint Stamps, with subsidiary S&G, was sold to Porelon, which was part of Identity Group and investment company JWA (Johnson Worldwide Associate).

1988 - Boras Stampelfabrik started business in the U.K. with the company Evermark, run by Geoffrey Betts

1988 - Boras Stampelfabrik with subsidiaries in Gothenburg and Stockholm, and Swedpoint Stamps with subsidiaries (among them Stamplar & Gravyrer) merged to become UniGraphics. Identity Group gave shares in UniGraphics to Algot’s sons and Boras Stampelfabriks shareholders Hans, Lars and Thomas Bengtsson.

1989 - Swedish operations were split into three divisions, where Swedish operations (UniGraphics Svenska AB) was run by Managing Director, Leif Lindskog, while UniGraphics Marking Systems (UMS) was run by Per-Arne Carlsson and UniGraphics International (containing Evermark) was run by Thomas Bengtsson.

1993 - All Swedish operations were merged into one unit, UniGraphics AB, with Leif Lindskog appointed as Managing Director.

Hakan Lindstrom (Marketing Manager) organised a “Perma Stamp Group”, in England comprising leading Perma stamp makers, WJC, MCB, Richford’s, British Stamp and August Engraving, Dublin to form a marketing group to combat the “Dormy” own brand of pre-inked stamps.

1996 - UniGraphics bought a 50% share of UK stamp maker Mark C. Brown in Hull and in 2003 they bought the remaining 50%. Mark C. Brown Ltd. became a subsidiary of UniGraphics.

Stamplar & Gravyrer had been a distributor for COLOP in Sweden since 1984, six years before merging with Boras Stampelfabrik to become UniGraphics, and in 2006, COLOP bought all of the shares in UniGraphics from Identity Group, and in doing so, became a 100% owner of Mark C. Brown.

Swedish brands known in the international stamp market were Klimax, Stampline, Point and Perma.

2008 - Torbjorn Sund appointed Managing Director.

UniGraphics is a member of the Swedish Stamp Guild and together with their Guild partners have visited the UK Stamp Guild. UniGraphics has a great group and business relationship with COLOP UK in Birmingham.

**Ernst REINER GmbH & Co KG** - Germany

Founder Ernst REINER (1890-1972) was born in Furtwangen, Black Forest, Germany

1913 - Ernst REINER finished his education as a master clockmaker in Glashuette Saxony. He started his own business - a turning shop for small components that go into airplanes such as compasses and clocks etc.

1919 - Development of the first numbering machine with a counting mechanism, different from the existing products of Hammer in Aschersleben and Köhler in Berlin. This development resulted in "model B6" numbering machine. This new mechanism was later on also used by Printator company in Berlin.

Printator moved to England just before World War 2 and became " English Numbering Company” (later ENM?)

1920’s - REINER company joined a group of Black Forest companies - the idea was to get more power and performance in the markets. The project failed in 1925 due to the economic & inflation crisis.

Reiner company continued on its own after that. The main products were a growing line of numbering machines. The company also offered a bicycle dynamo and a corresponding lamp. They manufactured drives for gramophones & components for electric relays for BBC (Brown Boveri Cie, today ABB in Switzerland)

A small R&D department was created and REINER got a contract from ENIGMA company in Berlin to continue development of a special coding machine. The project was later moved back to Berlin.

1930’s - A new numbering machine was launched using new technologies like blanking and bending sheet metal to frames and using casted zinc alloy printwheels. Its model number was B2 - it became a breakthrough in export business. The domestic market was still dominated by Hammer company and Koehler. More models were developed like metal daters and clock time stamps.

Due to the political developments at that time, BBC decided to have its relays built fully in Germany. REINER got the contract which should last until the late 1970´s. Within this project, REINER had to develop small ball bearings with a max. diameter of 2.5mm (1/10"). These bearings were also sold to other manufacturers and reached a monthly output of 300,000 pieces! As these bearings were later ranked as "war relevant", REINER was admitted to buy raw materials which were also used to produce numbering machines - despite the fact that this production was officially closed down by the German Government. This helped the company to keep in contact with its customers during World War II and it certainly helped after 1945 to continue the numbering machine business.

1945 - After World War II, the company was stripped down and lost a lot of its machinery and tools. Due to the continued friendly contacts with its customers, REINER could survive whereas the big competitors disappeared. Hammer in Aschersleben was nationalised and named Ziffernwerke Aschersleben. Koehler in Berlin could not recover from the bombing in Berlin.

1950’s - With his two sons returned from Russian prisoner of war camps in 1949, Ernst Reiner continued his business concentrating on hand and electric numbering machines. The company was reorganized: Ernst as president, being responsible for technology, Kurt being responsible for sales and Ernst August covering purchasing. Based on their experience and know-how of numbering machines, the company developed small printheads for price marking label guns. New regulations asking for products in a store to be marked with its price created a new market. Reiner´s main customer for these printheads was METO in Hirschhorn, Germany. This business lasted until the 1990´s when barcodes conquered the market.

The strategy of the company was defined in those years. Quality of product was the number one issue and economic independence has been the major goal ever since. This proved to be the base for the upcoming success for decades. REINER developed to the major player in numbering machines in Europe, also due to the economic development in Germany.

Kurt Reiner joined the company in 1950, finally retiring as President in 1986.

1960’s - The company expanded during these years, building more production space about every 8 years. At the same time a design & development department was set up - new product was developed and existing models were updated and redesigned in order to use the latest technologies in production.

As the economy expanded and banks were experimenting with payment automation, REINER started to develop special printers to print code lines on cheques. By the end of the 1960´s this new market had opened up and REINER built a new product line in the years to come.

1970’s - This new line of OCR-printers succeeded in the market and this guided REINER towards electronics. As the first printers were merely mechanical printers with electric drives, the following generations of OCR printers consisted of microprocessor-controlled print mechanisms like dot matrix printheads in the 1980´s.

The business continued to grow during the 1970´s and the company was reorganized into three major divisions: (1) Numbering Machine - Hand and Electric (2) Subcontract Parts to other industries (3) Banking Machines - OCR Printers

1981 - Andreas Reiner joined his father in the business.

1986 - Kurt Reiner resigned as president of the company and his son, Andreas Reiner took over as President.

***Andreas Reiners’ story………***

*1980’s - As the know-how of electronics grew, REINER applied this technology not only to printers but also to its electric stamps. New models were developed like Mod 785 a two-line printer with dot matrix print head and Mod 740, a clock time stamp with text plate and a print head with print wheels that were fully controlled by software.*

*Just as OCR printers were based on know-how of numbering machine design, the stamp line could profit from the electronic know how gained from the OCR technology. However, standard numbering machines still contributed to be a large part to the business. Large projects were won in export markets - like tens of thousands of Mod B6 to Iran or later on special daters for the UK Post Office and also UK Customs & Excise offices.*

*1986 - I became President of the company.*

*1990’s - This decade was mainly influenced by the breakdown of the iron curtain and the start of internet and digitalization. The reunification of East & West Germany created new market potential for a couple of years. Banking infrastructure for East Germany and also a new post* *code system for the reunited Germany brought business for thousands of OCR encoders and mail stamps. Technological developments did not stop, impacting the company’s markets - by the end of the 1990´s REINER had started several initiatives to be prepared for the coming changes.*

*1996 - IP Systeme was taken over. This software company specialised in software for payment processing inside banks. Influenced by the ideas of IP systeme, REINER decided to develop special cheque scanners. These desk top units were combined with new recognition software helping to increase productivity in payment processing.*

*As the banks decided to go for digital payments based on smart cards, REINER decided to invest and develop smart card readers. It was soon clear that this electronic business was totally different from mechanical business and the result was a new subsidiary company created in 1997 - REINER sct (smart card technology).*

*Last but not least, REINER started to develop the first electronic stamp based on ink jet print heads- which should become jetStamp 790.*

*2000’s - Markets have changed dramatically in this period. Internet and digitalization disrupted working processes and customer behaviour, products became obsolete and marketing channels were under heavy pressure. Reiner had to discontinue its line of OCR printers as banks moved to electronic banking. To follow the market, REINER today offers a line of self-service scanners that work inside ATM´s to accept cheque deposits and other documents. As China has become an important market for this business, REINER established a trade office in Guangzhou.*

*On the stamp side of the business the jetStamp line has been upgraded with new models that are capable of printing bar codes and QR codes and up to a letter size of one inch. Special inks allow printing on metal and plastic surfaces. Automatic numbering, clock time and date being standard functions in these new products.*

*2017 - Frank Stauch joined the company.*

*2018 - I retired and handed over to Mr. Frank Stauch, the new President and the first non-family member to run the company.*

*Please also visit* [*www.reiner.de*](http://www.reiner.de)

**Noris-Color GmbH** - Germany

1892 - The company “Chemische Fabrik Nurnburg, Dr. John & Breitschopp” was founded by the great-great grandparent of the current Directors. The company started business with the production of different kinds of inks and adhesives.

1900 - Registration of the trade name “Noris” for stamp inks.

1901 - Development of the first textile ink which is washable and resistant to heat.

1906 - The company was honoured with the Grand Prix for the textile ink at the Paris Fair.

1906 - Awarded the “Golden Medal” for quality at the Nurenberg Fair.

1943 - The factory was completely destroyed during WWII and reconstructed in Kulmbach.

1970 - The company moved into a new building in Kulmbach.

1987 - Lothar Zeitler succeeds to lead the company as the 4th generation of the family.

1988 - Gordon King becomes UK distributor of Noris-Color Inks

1991 - The company expands with a new production plant.

1993 - The company changed its name to “Noris-Color GmbH”.

1994 - Introduction of NCI (Noris-Color Information System) for information about stamp inks and their applications.

1996 - Special stamp pad ink 191 awarded Gold Medal at the International Business Fair in Warsaw.

1997 - Creation of the homepage [www.noris-color.de](http://www.noris-color.de)

2001 - Construction of a new 6000 square meter factory.

2003 - License agreement with the company Trodat - Poland.

2008 - Opening of an additional 1200 square meters of manufacturing and storage hall.

2011 - An electronic interactive product catalogue is published [www.stamppadinks.com](http://www.stamppadinks.com) which included ink advice for various application areas.

2011 - Oliver Zeitler joined the company (5th generation family) and was appointed Managing Director of Noris-Color GmbH.

2012 - [www.facebook.com/noriscoloradditional](http://www.facebook.com/noriscoloradditional)

2013 - A further 2500 square meters of additional industrial land was purchased.

2018 - An additional 100 square meters of laboratory space and 600 square meters (9 meters high) of additional warehouse was constructed.

Noris-Color inks are now sold directly into more than 130 countries worldwide and indirectly, to many more.

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This ‘History of the Rubber Stamp Manufacturers’ Guild’ has been greatly enhanced and improved by the contributions from many friends and colleagues in the industry. I would particularly like to acknowledge the following contributors for their personal messages and memories of their careers and time in the rubber stamp industry.; -

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*If anyone has knowledge of other companies that should be added to the list of stamp makers or would like to add recollections of their employers or their personal employment history in the industry, please contact the RSMG Secretary with the additional information.*

**Disclaimer:**
In writing this story, much of what is written is as I remember it or as I’ve been told by others.

As well as writing about the history of the RSMG, I wanted to include the history of some of the individual stamp companies that made up the membership and the wider non-Guild industry, plus the personal employment memories of some colleagues who worked at those companies. It soon became clear that due to technological innovations, particularly those developed during the 1970’s, the story would have to include a section devoted to some of the overseas stamp makers and/or suppliers who invented the revolutionary products adopted by the stamp industry, worldwide.

**UK & Ireland Rubber Stamp Makers -** (not necessarily RSMG members)

Pneumatic Rubber Stamps Eric Andrews MD / Richard Chapman / John Denver London
Waller ? London
M B F Robert Dickson / George Cook Paisley
John T Clarke Arthur Brooks / Brian Sykes / Anita Henshall Stockport
Dormy Ltd. Malcolm McIntyre Stockport
C. Williams Sidney Beddoes / Anne Garmory / Irene Pywell Liverpool
E. M. Richford John Richford London/Sudbury
Wood & Palmer Stan Castle MD City of London
Albert & Edwards ? London
Goddard ? London
Bristol Rubber Stamps ? Bristol
John Meerloo Tom Cook MS / Frank Western London
Mark C. Brown Chris Brown Hull
West Riding Rubber Stamps Geoff Hemming / Alan South MD Leeds
Norwich R.S. / Stamps Direct David Gigg / Colin Cousins Norwich
Greenhalgh/British Stamp Gordon King Stockport
Ash Rubber Stamps David Hudson / Margaret Tyler Birmingham
Roger Needham & Son Mr. Brabbins / Frank Thompson Salford
G H Tomlin & Co. Tony Keithley / Mark Keithley Liverpool
Van-der-Velde Edward Henderson / Gerald Hitman Newcastle-upon-Tyne
The Rubber Stamp Co. Denis Cole London or Belfast?
GFL Ltd. Michael FitzGibbon / Michael Gutteridge Hackney, London
Advanced Stamp & Plate Co. Nigel Eyre / (Richard Eyre) / Steve Turley Sheffield
John Boland Print & Stamps John Boland / Steve Draper Hull
Manchester Rubber Stamps Mr. Scholfield / Geoff Hewitt Manchester
B J Rubber Stamp Steve Blackwell Lichfield
Evermark Ltd. Geoff Betts Wooburn Green
S. Slinger Ltd. Edwin Slinger Mitcham/Victoria
A & A Slinger Alan Slinger Falkirk, Scotland
Kirkstall Rubber Stamp Ron Walsh Leeds
Bishopsgate Rubber Stamps Ted Griffiths London
Denis Evans & Co. Ron English London
Supreme Rubber Stamp Co Ltd Keith Hill Huthwaite, Notts.
William Jones Clifton & Co. Ltd. Charles Ramsden / Joe Walker / Gordon Hills London/King’s Lynn
Jones Clifton (Scotland) Ltd. John Clarke (MD) Glasgow
Jones Clifton (Birmingham) Ltd. Tony Jones (MD) Birmingham
Taunton Rubber Stamp Co. Stuart Littlejohns (Gen Manager) Taunton
Aire Valley Rubber Stamp Ltd. Dave Moody (Gen Manager) Bradford
Kley Bros. Achibald, John & Robert Leadsom / Frank Thompson Bootle, Liverpool
Warren Manufacturing Alan Sandy / Geoff Betts Coulsden, Surrey
Snows Trevor Green MD Southampton
November Express Fred Tappenden Southampton
Speedy Stamps James Leary Rotherham
Hunt Bros. ? Walthamstow London
British Rubber Stamp Stan Bolton London
H. Savage Mr.Philips Hackney Rd. London
Ace Rubber Stamps Roy Adams MD Bristol
Lamport Rubber Stamps John Lamport City of London
John Berkley Frank Thompson Birmingham
Express Rubber Stamp Co Roger Button MD Kettering
N. J. Cherry (Typesetters) Nick Cherry MD Leicester
Shorebridge Alan Sandy Wooburn Green
Blade Rubber Stamps Kaye Graham London
Glass House Trading ? Gibraltar
CRS Stamps Nikki Fell Dorset
Make Your Mark Rubber Stamps Paul Barker York
Enterprise Rubber Stamps Alison Bailey Southampton
Tom Gutherless Chris Gutherless Hull
NCB Marking Norman Bowers Birmingham
Antel Rubber Stamps Terry Hepple Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Astute (Scotland) Ltd. Carol Brown / Kay or Alistair Donald Forfar
Y-Ryte Roger ? Cheltenham
Andover Rubber Stamps Tim Marquis Andover
Century Publicity Midlands Ltd. ? Birmingham
Stampit UK Ltd. Daniel Naracci Dinnington
Swift Publicity Ltd. Danny Gutmann London
Just Stamps ? ?
Bolsons Phil Clarke London
Avenue Rubber Stamps ? ?
The Stamp Shop Geoff Read Liverpool
MK Marking Richard Moore Milton Keynes
Stampreo (Rubber) Ltd. Rob Nevis / Clive Nevis Hull
Southampton Rubber Stamp Co. Bob Moseley Southampton
Stampexpress ? ?
Europa Rubber Stamps Martin Greengrass / Bob Simpson / Rodney Greer Norwich
Hayling Island Rubber Stamps Michael Newby Hayling Island
Robert Van Houghton ? London
Pioneer Rubber Stamps Steve McGarvie / Kathe Rowland Newcastle-upon-Tyne
West Riding Engravers Alan South Leeds
Central Rubber Stamps Pat Day Birmingham
Eastbourne Rubber Stamps Anne & Bill Cracknell Eastbourne
Swift Stamps Dave Cooper Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Solid Rubber Stamps Bob Kelly Hampshire
Kershaws Rubber Stamps Dave and Janis Kershaw Darwen, Lancs.
Trodat UK Stuart Login
COLOP UK Kiran D. Mistry Birmingham

**Associate (Supplier) Guild Members**

Ludwig Chris Ludwig St. Albans
Shachihata Kazu Hayashi Runcorn
Prime Solutions Dave Johnson Warrington
Polydiam Naresh Kapardia London
Selecta Products Nigel Eyre Sheffield
Noris-Color Inks Lothar Zeitler Kulmbach, Germany
Trodat Wels, Austria
COLOP Wels, Austria