

A Brief History of Stamp Boxes and Cases

Introduction

No one can be said to have invented the stamp box. It developed naturally out of the changes to the postal system of the United Kingdom. Before the advent of pre-paid postage in May 1840, letters could be sealed with commercially available moistened paper wafers and inkstands were often provided with receptacles to hold these wafers. Once stamps (together with adhesive envelopes) became widely available, it would have been natural to use the wafer compartment to hold stamps. Indeed, for a period of time, some writing and stationary boxes were provided with compartments for both wafers and stamps. Wafer seals of this period were often printed with mottoes such as 'Respect the Truth' or even 'Thank Rowland Hill for this' in honour of the originator of penny postage. However, the rapid expansion in the volume of letter writing that penny postage generated, first in the United Kingdom and then rapidly across the rest of the world, created a demand for special boxes to hold the new stamps.

The early stamps were both imperforate (requiring scissors to separate them into individual units) and quite expensive in real terms (a 1d stamp in 1840 was worth about £1.20 in purchasing power today). As with other items that were both intrinsically valuable and easily lost or misplaced (e.g. tea, snuff, and jewellery) enterprising manufacturers soon produced dedicated containers. The firm of John and William Guest showed a 'Postage-stamp box and damper' in the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the first printed mention of stamp boxes by name, the first registered designs and the first advertisements appeared at about the same time.

Individual compartments for stamps of different denominations was a design feature of some of the very early boxes, but the provision of slopes within compartments in boxes to aid the extraction of stamps was a later development of the 1870s or later. Collectors should be cautious of boxes that may have been 'improved' or converted into a stamp box by the later addition of slopes. Boxes with a large dished compartment (especially in an inkstand) rather than a slope which runs from the back of the compartment to the front may well have been intended for nibs rather than stamps. Vesta boxes, which may also be confused with stamp boxes, tend to betray their origins with the presence of a 'striker' surface somewhere on the body of the box.

This article traces a little of the history and development of both stamp boxes (containers to hold stamps in the home or office) and stamp cases (containers to carry stamps on the person) from the 1840s to the present day. The peak period for the manufacture of these items was from about 1890 to 1914. This was a time by which, strictly, the need for such items must have diminished as a purse or wallet with a stamp compartment would have served perfectly well in most cases. However, this period was also one in which the genius of Victorian manufacture in taking a relatively mundane article and investing it with a wonderful amount of invention and imagination reached its full flowering. Stamp boxes and cases were produced right across the world (Europe, North and South America, the Near and Far East, and Australia) in a bewilderingly large number of designs, ranging from the artistically beautiful to the downright ugly and unusable. However, the social and economic changes that followed the First World War and the increased popularity of the stamp booklet largely undermined the demand in Britain for an item that could be seen as largely 'middle class frippery'. Production continued in the USA and elsewhere, however, throughout the inter-war period.

Stamp Boxes and Cases 1840-1879

The First Registered Designs

The earliest known registered design known to be for a stamp box is that taken out by Charles Maschwitz Junior on October 29th 1850. No example has been seen, but the original design incorporated individual spring-loaded compartments to aid the removal of stamps. This was a feature of the better-

made silver boxes and cases dating from the 1890s. Indeed, many other features found on silver boxes forty years later were anticipated by enterprising designers in the 1850s, though it is doubtful if all of the registered designs were actually produced. These designs include one of the first designs in which a postage stamp compartment was included within a multi-use object (a combination piece). This was the 'writing case and taper stand' in the form of a locomotive for whom John Simons received provisional registration in 1853. The description of the proposed use of this design suggested that 'postage stamps may be kept at one end and wafers at the other' which confirms that wafers remained in use for some time after the introduction of stamps. The first object known currently that contains a specific named compartment for postage stamps is Sheldon's 'Pocket Escritoir' registered on November 16, 1843.

Early designs often incorporated a method for wetting stamps (a damper). Such designs were registered by Hardy and Jolly ('letter damper and stamper'), and Henry Moore Naylor ('portable label case and damper') in 1854, and by G.T.Wallis and G.E.Smith ('adhesive stamper damper') in 1862. One of the most interesting of these early designs that was actually made was Wharton's Rotary Stamp Box of 1854. This consisted of a spindle around which could be coiled a strip of stamps. Perforated stamps only became widely available in that year and this design was clearly intended to exploit this new development. As with most of the other early registered designs, Wharton's original design incorporated a damper. However, the box when manufactured omitted this feature. Thomas Wharton had already shown an interest in writing equipment and accessories when he registered a spring-loaded taper-holder with a base chequered as a wafer seal in 1846. The incorporation of dampers, which would be useful if the use of many stamps at once rather than one was envisaged, suggests that these early registered designs were intended for office rather than domestic use.

Tunbridge Ware boxes

Stamp boxes were certainly made before the first registered designs appeared. The first dedicated stamp boxes were probably adapted circular Tunbridge Ware snuff boxes displaying miniature parquetry decoration with a 1d black affixed to the lid. Circular snuff boxes were advertised for sale along with a wide range of other Tunbridge Ware in 1840-41 by William Fenner and Co. at two shillings and sixpence along with wafer boxes at the same price (wafers with rubber were ninepence), but the price list does not include stamp boxes. It is reasonable to believe (though the evidence is at best circumstantial) that the stamp boxes would have been available to visitors at the start of the season in 1840 in Tunbridge Wells which coincided with the date of introduction of the new stamps. The similar circular Tunbridge Ware snuff boxes bearing the first issue 1d reds would then represent the production of boxes from February 1841 in time for the next season.

Tunbridge Ware manufactories were in competition with Mauchline Ware producers (below) for wooden souvenir ware. They were accordingly alert to new opportunities to expand the range of souvenir items produced as an inspection of the variety of items made demonstrates. Square and rectangular boxes designed explicitly to hold stamps appear to have been made to replace the adapted circular snuff boxes from an early date. One such design was that which incorporated a first issue penny red with the base of the stamp removed. Such boxes are known to be the work of Edmund Nye. Examples have been noted carrying inscriptions from 1844. Boxes with real postage stamps affixed were a standard item of Tunbridge Ware and were made throughout the period of commercial production until it ended in about 1927. The normal practice was to use current, mint, low-denominated (1/2d and 1d penny) stamps for decoration in Victorian and Edwardian periods, which is a great aid, therefore, in the dating of these boxes. Presumably to save on the cost of buying mint stamps, Tunbridge Ware manufactures produced facsimile postage and revenue stamps. Such boxes are known with inscribed dates from 1858. There are a surprising number of design variations in these facsimile postage stamps for which no convincing reason has yet been advanced.

It is generally agreed that the finest Tunbridge Ware stamp boxes are those with a representation of the head of Queen Victoria formed from minute pieces of coloured wood (the tesserae head boxes).

These are thought to have been available from the mid 1840s and were still being produced by one manufacturer (Thomas Barton) as late as 1897. Tunbridge Ware boxes with individual compartments for stamps appear to have been made from the 1860s, but boxes with slopes are both unusual and of a much later date, probably towards the end of the century.

Mauchline Ware boxes

It is clear that Mauchline Ware boxes were also produced from an early date. A leading manufacturer revealed in *The Art Journal* of 1850 that 'As the snuff business continued to fall off, we sought out other articles of woodware to which we could apply our ornaments; these now consist of every article which you can conceive it possible to make, from postage-stamp boxes up to trays'. As with Tunbridge Ware, the first boxes were adapted snuff boxes. These rectangular boxes were made in the Tartan Ware finish and incorporate the 'concealed hinge' construction that gave a tight fitting lid to keep the snuff dry. Such boxes often retain the tin foil linings intended for snuff, but have compartments for stamps and/or may also have a real or facsimile postage stamp affixed to the lid. In some cases it may still be possible to read the manufacturer's name impressed into this foil lining (normally W. & A. Smith or Davidson, Wilson & Amphlet). Similar but later boxes without foil linings had pin hinges as an air tight fit was not necessary for stamp boxes.

The two most commonly encountered finishes of Mauchline Ware stamp boxes are those in Tartan Ware or Transfer Ware. In comparison with Tunbridge Ware, Mauchline Ware manufacturers created both a much larger variety of boxes to hold stamps, and also made stamp cases for pocket use. Again like Tunbridge Ware producers, they used a variety of facsimile stamps on their boxes. There is a particularly interesting series of facsimile receipt stamps (dating from 1853) where, apparently in an attempt to keep their boxes 'current', they followed the design changes made in the issued stamps. These circular draft and receipt stamp boxes were clearly intended for office rather than home use.

One relatively early form of box, which remained in production until towards the end of the century, is the flat circular box with a transfer print on one side and a real or miniature facsimile postage stamp to the lid. Less common are rectangular boxes with sliding drawers with up to three stamp compartments. Mauchline Ware manufactures were very active in the export trade and stamp boxes with real and/or facsimile Russian and French stamps are known, as are a wide range of Sycamore wood boxes with foreign transfer printed or photographic views.

Early Brass Boxes and Cases

The only significant manufactured alternative to wooden stamp boxes in the period between 1850 and 1879 would have been a brass stamp box or case. The most interesting and impressive early brass boxes are the range designed to hold both the standard line engraved 1d and 2d stamps and also the complete range of new surface printed higher value stamps that became available between 1855 and 1860. These boxes share several distinctive design features, particularly the form of the individually glazed compartments within which the individual denominated stamps could be kept and similar engraved decorations on the body of the box. These boxes are not marked with a manufacturer's name, but a smaller example made just to hold the two low value denominations and receipt stamps carries the name of Howell, James and Co of Regent Street. This firm did manufacture jewellery, silver and clocks, but it is likely that as this firm was primarily a commercial retailer, another firm made these brass stamp boxes. Other brass boxes may be dated to the period 1850-1870 both by the stamps to be found in sealed glazed compartments and designs that typically are of a fairly plain, solid gauge construction.

Brass stamp cases first appeared in the 1870s. Several designs of brass stamp cases were registered in 1874 though there seems no philatelic reason for such a bunching of registrations. These cases were all closely related to designs for brass needlecases (and indeed some registrations describe the use of the cases as for either stamps or needles).

Embroidered Stamp Cases

Not all stamp boxes and cases of the early period were commercially produced. The passion of Victorian ladies for domestic and church embroidery is reflected in the existence of a wide range of hand stitched stamp cases. Bristol board, a sort of stiffened paper punched with regularly spaced holes for embroidery, could be bought from stationers by 1850. Stamp cases made using this board are known dated from as early as 1854, and examples are known right through to the Edwardian period. A rhyme, which is frequently to be found on these cases runs: 'In England letters have no grace unless they bare Victoria's face. To guard her head from dust and damps, this case was made for Postage Stamps'. The frequency with which this verse (or similar) is encountered suggests that there was a pattern for it widely available to Victorian ladies, either in a standard book of needlework designs or perhaps through one of the hand-coloured cross-stitch patterns sold commercially. Embroideries employing beadwork rather than cross-stitch are likely to fall into the period 1845-55 which were the peak years for this sort of decoration.

Stamp Boxes and Cases 1880 - 1914

Silver Stamp Boxes and Cases

Silver stamp boxes are known with hallmarks dating from 1860, though any such box dated before 1890 is very unusual. Robert Hennell of London made a sprung stamp applicator in both silver and brass from 1869, employing a design patented by Sir John Macneill in 1868. Joseph Taylor of Birmingham registered a stamp locket with a swivelling inner sleeve in January 1880 (the earliest known registered stamp box or case made in silver) and another manufacturer (hallmark M.W.) of the same city registered a square box with a sprung compartment in June of the same year. However, it was not until ten years later that silver desk boxes and silver and gold cases for stamps became widely produced. This development appears to be largely a response to the general fall in world silver prices which accelerated in the 1890s and continued up to the outbreak of the First World War. Silver prices more than halved between 1874 and 1894. The fortunate coincidence of expanding home and world markets, a precious metal now affordable for the production of relatively mundane articles, and an established skilled (and cheap) labour force in both the jewellery and silversmith industries in Birmingham and London combined to allow the full expression of the innate inventiveness of the Victorian designer. The period 1890-1914 may well be described as the golden age of the stamp box.

British desk boxes of this period could be either relatively plain or highly embossed, but examples produced in the USA tend to be quite ornate. French boxes in silver are uncommon but where found are very stylish. An apparently popular design in Britain was the curved trough with one or more compartments standing on four ball feet with a single hinged lid displaying a stamp (or stamps) behind glass. Another attractive design made throughout the period from around 1898 to 1914 was the single or multiple compartment box with a sloping top and a gadrooned base. Like the trough, such boxes had a single hinged lid with a stamp or stamps behind glass. A cheaper form of the sloping top box had the body of the box made from leather but with a silver glazed lid. Desk boxes with individually opening glazed compartments are much more unusual than those with a single hinged lid. Precise dating and identification of manufacturer is generally straightforward for British boxes because of the hallmarking system. Marks on Tiffany and Gorham boxes for the USA can also be used to give this information. Generally, however, it is only the manufacturer of American silver boxes that can be identified, and approximate dates of manufacture have to be inferred from the design and ornamentation of the box. Apart from Dutch boxes, continental silver boxes rarely carry anything more than an indication of country of origin and fineness of silver used in manufacture.

Silver stamp cases were primarily manufactured in Britain and the USA, though examples from Germany and Denmark are also known. Cases can be sub-divided into those that have suspension loops from which they could be suspended from a chain, and pocket cases. The best examples of the former display enamelled representations of stamps. Top quality lockets might have both a push button release

and a sprung compartment for ease of stamp extraction. Both Britain and the USA produced cases to hold strips of stamps around a central spindle. The USA specialised in the production of small ornate cases very like the match cases (or vesta cases) available at the same time. Also to be found are cases for Fraternal Orders such as the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks and cases made for exhibitions. In Britain, the most common form of locket in silver was the envelope. These were also made in gold. A surprising variety of envelope designs was made, with the peak period of production being between 1903 and 1910. Four manufacturers (Adie and Lovekin, Gourdel, Vales & Co, A.E. Jenkins and Crisford & Norris) were responsible for the bulk of envelope production, with A.E. Jenkins (often confused by auctioneers with the better known firm of A.E. Jones) of Birmingham being both the most prolific and the most inventive of these makers.

Pocket cases in silver appear to have preceded the locket and were made throughout this period. The most popular design seems to have been the flat double case patented in 1903 by Ahronsberg Brothers. This was also made in gold and in EPNS. Cases were made in Britain to take stamp booklets as soon as these were introduced in 1904.

Attractive locket/pocket cases can be found which display a combination of uses, one of which is to hold stamps. The most usual combinations are with vesta cases, cigarette cases, card cases and sovereign cases. Vesta cases in particular display an impressive variety of ways to include a stamp compartment, both internally and externally to the body of the case and may also extend to further compartments for photographs and sovereigns. An early example (the patent was taken out in 1887) combined a vesta case with a stamp case, propelling pencil and toothpick.

Silver items for the desk were often designed to incorporate a compartment to hold stamps, and some of the most attractive stamp box items are to be found in this category. The list of such objects is very wide, and includes inkwells, pen trays, paper weights, paper knives, watch stands, calendars, postal scales, blotters, dampers and note pads. Inkwell combination pieces were made both as desk items and in the form of travelling inkwells or writing sets.

Novelty Silver Stamp Boxes

Also intended as desk pieces, a range of novelty silver stamp boxes was produced with the firm of Saunders and Shepherd at the forefront of this type of innovative design. The severely impractical wheelbarrow is perhaps the best known, but other such objects include a garden trug, a cigar box, a sledge, a sedan chair, a golf club, a bee hive, a knife box, a dog kennel, a lectern, a coal scuttle, several lanterns and a variety of imitation desks, tables and chests of drawers.

Silver Stamp Dispensers

Judging from the earliest registered designs for stamp boxes in the 1850s, it is clear that it was thought to be convenient to cut up stamps from sheets into strips or coils so that they could be fed into a dispenser and torn off one by one. Coils are generally referred to as rolls in the USA. Dispensers are generally circular, cylindrical or oval in shape so that coils of stamps can be stored around an internal spindle. One or more slits in the body of the dispenser allow stamps to be individually accessed. Silver dispensers were made in Britain around the turn of the century, well before such coils could be purchased from Post Offices (from 1912), with the firm of Asprey and Sons in particular manufacturing and retailing several fine designs. The manufacturer W.J. Hornby also produced a range of dispensers that included a distinctive plunger which could dispense a single stamp at a time. Combination silver pencils and pens with an integral stamp dispenser to the handle were made in the USA but are very rare. The USA has used stamp coils and dispensers much more than Britain or other countries, and continues to do so. Silver dispensers from the USA tend to be inter-war or later productions and may have slits for both airmail and postage stamps.

Other Boxes of 1880 - 1914

Whilst silver boxes maintain a special and enduring attraction to collectors, there were many very fine and attractive stamp boxes and cases made in other materials in the period up to 1914. Some broad groupings of these boxes are given below.

Art Nouveau Boxes

Stamp box design followed the prevailing fashions of the day. WMF (Wurttembergische Metallwarenfabrik) in Germany manufactured several stamp boxes and cases as part of their extensive range of household articles designed in the Art Nouveau style. Liberty's of London and Tiffany's in New York are both associated with the promotion of Art Nouveau design, and both firms produced stamp boxes, the latter generally designed as part of desk sets. The finest stamp boxes in Art Nouveau or any other fashion were those made by Fabergé and his competitors in Russia. The House of Fabergé is perhaps best known for the manufacture of grand presentation pieces for the wealthy at around the end of the last century. However, much of the production of this artist-jeweller was of smaller, more affordable pieces, which could be bought commercially from branches in Russia and London. Numerous stamp boxes are recorded (not all with Art Nouveau designs) as part of this extensive range. The boast of Fabergé was that he seldom repeated a design so that each box is a unique production.

Souvenir Wooden Boxes

Tunbridge Ware and Mauchline Ware manufacturers dominated the wooden souvenir market in Britain, but there were also several centres of similar production on the Continent. Three such were the carved or poked work wooden items from the Alpine regions of France, Switzerland, Austria and Germany, the distinctive souvenir ware from Sorrento in Italy and the painted ware from Spa in Belgium. Most carved Alpine boxes carry the name of the resort from where they were purchased (though it was also possible to have one's own town or city put onto the box – presumably the origin of the box marked 'Doncaster'). Although many of these boxes were quite crudely finished, it is possible to find boxes displaying some very fine carving.

Sorrento Ware boxes with tessellated mosaic designs (thought to date between 1880 and 1910) are frequently confused with Tunbridge Ware boxes. Generally, however, they are of lower quality than Tunbridge Ware boxes with their crude internal slopes and often poorly matched tesserae panels to the lid. One simple way of distinguishing between them is that it was only Sorrento Ware stamp boxes that had hinged lids. Additionally, Tunbridge Ware stamp boxes are generally found designed to take a stamp as an integral part of the decoration. This would be exceptional in a Sorrento stamp box. The most frequently encountered Sorrento Ware stamp boxes dating before 1914 are those with oval or round marquetry panels with dark or ebonized wood backgrounds on olive wood carcasses depicting bare-footed peasants. Later productions also in olive wood exhibit mosaic marquetry birds (often swallows) to their lids. These boxes also appear to have been made in Sorrento for other Mediterranean resorts, and have been seen bearing inscriptions such as 'Souvenir de Cannes', 'San Remo' and 'Bellagio'. These boxes often have a distinctive brass 'hook and eye' fastening at the front of the box. Olive wood boxes were also made in several other countries bordering the Mediterranean and often carry the name of the resort or town from which they were purchased.

The town of Spa in southern Belgium produced stamp boxes as part of its extensive range of souvenir ware. These hinged boxes with slopes and compartments are datable to the end of the nineteenth century. They have a distinctive slightly domed shape and small pieces of metal set into the corners of the box. Some boxes carry the name of the town. The hand painting on the lids of these boxes (typically flowers or animals) can be quite fine.

Although not strictly souvenir ware, one historically interesting form of carved wooden stamp box is that made by Boer prisoners during the second Boer war (1899 – 1902) which bear the shield of the Transvaal

and the inscription 'Eendragt Maakt Mact' (Unity Makes Strength) to the lid. Boer prisoners were imprisoned on St Helena and in India and Ceylon rather than South Africa for security reasons and, like French Napoleonic prisoners before them, carved a variety of objects to sell or give as gifts. German prisoners of World War One are known to have made similar boxes.

Ivory Boxes and Cases

Ivory stamp boxes are particularly associated with the centre of production of ivory goods in Dieppe, France but they were also produced in Britain and probably elsewhere. Hand painted ivory boxes, sometimes with representations of famous Eighteenth Century French romantic paintings, can be of very fine quality. Ivorine or 'French Ivory', which is a manufactured product made to imitate the natural material, was also used to make stamp boxes with painted designs. Particularly attractive ivory stamp boxes may be found which display high levels of expertise in their ornate carving.

Porcelain

These tend to be of European origin but Japan and the USA also produced such boxes. Porcelain stamp boxes have been identified carrying Dresden and other German marks, but the most commonly encountered are French Limoges boxes. Limoges stamp boxes have been made using similar designs for a long period and are still being produced today. Modern Limoges stamp boxes tend to have one long and one short sloped compartment, but this not an infallible guide to what are particularly difficult boxes to date. The china factory of W.H. Goss in its second period (1881-1934) produced a rectangular dish with lid (length 52mm, width 40mm, height 18mm) that has been subsequently identified as a stamp box, though there appears no contemporary evidence that Goss ever described this box as being explicitly for stamps. This box was probably an inter-war production This is also the case for the Grafton China 5 sided stamp box (stock number 300) which may also be found with the mark 'Herald Series' of William Holmes & Co, and the Grafton China rectangular stamp box and lid (47mm long, stock number 242). S.P.Co Ltd of Manchester produced a porcelain stamp box and lid (63mm long) in this same period.

Japanese and Chinese Boxes

It appears that the majority of Far Eastern stamp boxes were made for export to the USA and Europe. The interest in Oriental decoration and design started in the 1870s and greatly influenced Western manufacture during the late nineteenth century. A variety of materials and techniques were used for stamp boxes, including lacquered papier mache, carved lacquer, cloisonné enamelling and metalware. The quality of Oriental metalware boxes in particular varies enormously. The best may have silver and gold ornamentation or beautifully intricate cloisonné enamelling. The least expensive had their designs (often dragons or birds) stamped out in base metal and sprayed with metallic paint.

Mixed Materials

Many stamp boxes of this period display a mixture of materials in their design and construction to achieve their decorative effect. These include tortoiseshell and silver or brass, glass and silver, leather and silver, copper and brass, gold and steel, gold and silver, onyx and plated metal, agate and chrome, and gilded copper and coloured glass mosaic. The last named are particularly attractive boxes which were made in Italy. Surprisingly, given the attractive finish that can be obtained, copper was used infrequently on its own either for desk boxes or pocket cases. Gold and steel boxes displaying the technique of damascening in red and yellow gold on blackened steel are of Spanish origin, whilst Japanese gold and silver inlaid boxes exist of about the same period (c1890).

Advertising Stamp Cases

The USA was at the forefront of the use of the stamp case as a medium for advertising. These cases were made using the most modern materials, principally celluloid and aluminium, which could be easily printed or stamped with an advertisement. Celluloid cases with waxed papers to prevent the stamps from sticking to each other were made from about the turn of the century, and often carry a calendar of the year. They should not be confused with similar cases made to contain court or corn plasters! The stamp cases carried a very wide range of advertisements, from Hotels and Insurance Companies to Engineering works and Tobacco companies. They were presumably given away to clients in the same way as folding book matches are today. A similar advertising idea was captured in the production of leather or cloth bound miniature books containing miscellaneous information including postage rates and a calendar of the year along with waxed paper inserts or stamp compartments. These were made for a number of companies but perhaps the most enduring were the set produced by the Gorham Silver Company between 1901 (for the Pan American Exposition) up to at least 1926. A circular box represents one of the earliest uses of plastic for stamp boxes with a screw-on lid put out in 1895-6 by a Boston Insurance company.

Brass Boxes

Brass boxes were widely available as a cheaper substitute for silver boxes. Compared to those introduced in the middle of the century, boxes made towards the end of the century and beyond reflected the prevailing taste for ornateness. Such boxes were produced primarily in Britain, France, Germany and the USA. They became somewhat ponderous and were often heavily embossed, rather than displaying the more finely engraved lines and decoration of earlier designs. Decorative designs incorporating flowers and plants were popular. Few of these boxes carry manufacturers' names so it is difficult to place the precise country of origin in most cases. One exception is a commonly encountered design marked Ges Gesch (short for Gesetzlich Geschutzt or Registered) to the base, which is of German origin. Such boxes may also be marked 'Austria' or 'Czechoslovakia', possibly in an attempt to disguise the origin of these boxes after the First World War.

Leather Boxes

Wallets and purses, which had stamp compartments, were available from at least the 1880s and their obvious convenience has allowed them to continue in a relatively unchanged form from that time. One firm that produced a substantial range of pocket cases with stamp compartments fronted by tooled gold imitations of the stamps issued in 1881-2 was that of T.J. Smith, Son and Downes of London. These stamp designs contain the letters 'TJSD' in the corners. Cases are often marked as made in Vienna. Other (anonymous) manufacturers of this period also produced boxes and cases with tooled gold representations of stamps (including French stamps) to lids or interiors, and there are also a variety of later boxes with attractive Art Nouveau designs. Leather boxes appear to be more commonly of British or French origin, rather than from the USA.

Other Materials

New materials, particularly plastics, provided possibilities for use in box manufacture. Bois Durci is a wood-based plastic that could be moulded to a high finish. It can be considered the father of modern plastics as a patent was taken out for it in 1855, a year earlier than that for celluloid. Both straw and stone have been used for desk boxes, demonstrating that often appearance rather than strength was the first consideration. Tin was used for the large boxes used to hold stamps in offices.

Inter-War Boxes and Cases and After

There was some production of stamp boxes and cases in Britain after 1918, but it was on a much smaller scale than before the War. For example, A.E. Jenkins continued to produce both gold and silver envelope cases and the Goldsmiths and Silversmiths Company produced silver stamp boxes for a few years. It was a rather different matter in the USA, however, where the existence of dateable silver and silver-plated, brass, celluloid, porcelain, aluminium and wooden boxes shows the widespread continuation of production of stamp boxes and cases well into the 1930s. In Europe and the Middle East, a range of boxes continued to be made for the tourist market and WMF introduced some new stamp box designs in the 1920s. The development of Art Deco was reflected in stamp box design, but the number of such boxes compared to those displaying earlier Art Nouveau influences is much smaller.

The two other developments worthy of note in this period are the production of stamp booklet holders and enamel strip dispensers. Once the stamp booklet had become widely available, there was no real practical need for the stamp case, other than a container for the booklets. The first registered design for a booklet holder in Britain appears to be that taken out by G.A.Rogers and H.Rogers of Birmingham in 1933. This remained their copyright until 1948. Examples were made into at least the 1950s. Though cases of this type may be found in silver, generally they were produced in chrome and often have a town crest affixed to the front of the case. There is a surprising variety of designs of these chrome cases, particularly interesting examples being those produced for the coronation in 1953 and those with a painted illustration of a crinolined lady in a garden of lupines. Leather booklet holders were also a popular and widely produced item. Some recent boxes are to be found designed and made for cardboard. However, the finest quality stamp boxes currently in regular commercial production are the hand painted English enamel strip dispensers produced by the firms of Crummies, Halcyon Days and Staffordshire Enamels.