

# Some Pioneers of Packaging

The Patent "Express" Round Tobacco Packeting Machine. (Class B.)

## in Lincolnshire

by ALEC DAVIS



The fortunes of the firm of Rose began with machines for making-up round packets of tobacco. This picture of 1908 (above) shows a Rose machine as the key of the whole packaging operation — with something like a domestic laundry basket at the end of the sequence, collecting the made-up packs . . .

. . . of which this no doubt was typical (left).

**A**T the time of the Reformation, the villagers of Wrangle tore up their church service books and—according to Brears' *Short History of Lincolnshire*—made "papars thereof to wrappe spice in". It would not be too far-fetched to argue that those village people had the modern conception of the package as an aid to 'consumer convenience', though they did not have the modern idea that packaging was the manufacturer's concern. And it must be added that this idea took a long time to grow; even in London in 1680 an advertisement for a sale of tea recommended the buyer to "bring a convenient Box"; and a century-and-a-half later the first recorded boxmaker in Lincolnshire did not make boxes to supply in quantity to manufacturers but to sell individually to the public.

The boxmaker in question deserves more than passing notice. She was a Mrs. Cooper, of Gainsborough, a hard-working young widow who took up this trade in 1809 or '10. It must have been an unusual occupation for a woman at that time, but the only reason her activity has been recorded is that she was the mother of Thomas Cooper, Chartist, lecturer and author. His autobiography tells how his mother, when newly widowed, tried without success to earn a living as a dyer. But, Cooper explains, in those days . . .

"pasteboard boxes, made entirely by hand, were . . . in very general use both as small work-boxes among tradesmen's wives and daughters, and as larger conveniences for holding servants' clothes. My mother took up this manufacture, in addition to her business as a dyer".

In Gainsborough, she went from door to door to sell her boxes, but this also proved an unprofitable activity; so she began "to journey to the surrounding villages and farm-houses, carrying her burden—the smaller boxes within the large, often to the amount of twenty or thirty—on her head". Though Thomas Cooper was a very small boy at the time, he often went with his mother to the nearer villages; Lea, Bole and Morton are mentioned in this context in his book.

In 1811 the Coopers moved to a house in Bridge Street, Gainsborough, which had a small bow window, and the boxes were put on show there. In addition, then and for several years afterwards, Mrs. Cooper would cross the Trent by ferry once a week and walk to Epworth, twelve miles away, with a selection of boxes to sell in the market. But, Thomas Cooper recorded, "my dear mother had all along hard work to get a decent living, and pay her way".

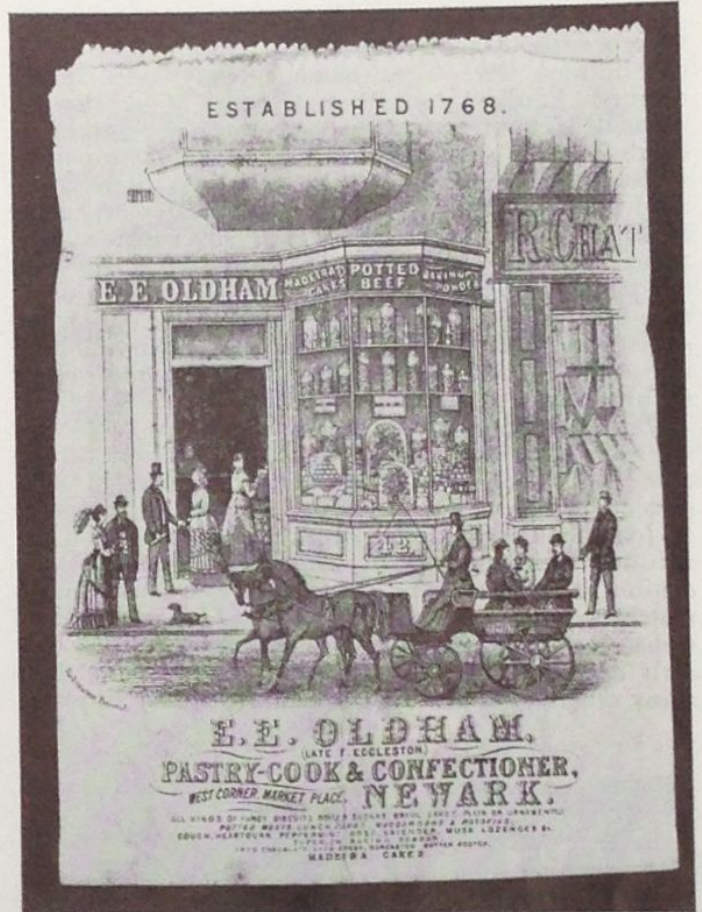
If these events are from the *pre*-history of packaging in Lincolnshire, it must be admitted that the history is equally fragmentary, with more question-marks than landmarks in its unfolding. But the fragments are fascinating for anyone who is interested in the social history of last century—and the few examples of early packaging which still exist are becoming collectors' pieces (ironically, in an age which is threatened with suffocation under the profusion of its own cast-off packages).

### Pills from Billingborough

In Lincolnshire as elsewhere, pills were among the first branded and packaged goods, and among their manufacturers was another business woman, a Mrs. Pattinson of Billingborough. She appears to have acquired this name by marriage in 1823, for in the *Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury* for 31 January that year, "C. Pattinson (late Berry)" informed her friends and the public in general that it was her intention "to prepare the BILIOUS PILLS, as usual; . . . they will still be sold by the name of Berry, which is written in her hand-writing on the label of each box." Long after this, it was common for the design of packs to include a printed reproduction of the manufacturer's signature, which was regarded as a guarantee of genuineness; Mrs. Pattinson's advertisement *may* be taken to mean that she really signed each box by hand. This would not have been a light task, for although she was no Beecham, she sold her pills over quite a wide area, through druggists or grocers in Southwell, Oakham, Boston, Kirton and Bourne . . . and Mrs. Ward, draper, Folkingham.

Above. The Victorian pharmacy from the Clarke carton, and a later nineteenth-century shopping scene from Newark, Notts, on a paper bag by Robinsons of Bristol (c. 1880).

Right. This familiar design of Clarke's Blood Mixture carton was in use (until recently) for many years. It is shown here alongside a fashion plate of the same period.



By this time quite a number of brand-named products were being sold nationally (a new state of affairs which the railways were to encourage greatly, later in the century). Yardley was selling lavender water; Keiller, marmalade; Burgess, essence of anchovies; Atkinson, bear's grease in pots and Hudson's botanic tooth powder in boxes and tincture in bottles. The latter were advertised in the same issue of the *Stamford Mercury* as the locally-made Berry pills, and their advertisement contained a similar warning to intending purchasers—that the label must be signed Hudson & Company and, in this case, countersigned "Jas. Atkinson, 44 Gerrard-street, Soho-square, London . . . the proprietor's wholesale agent". Drakard of Stamford was mentioned as one of the retailers of Atkinson's wares.

Thanks to easier transport, country shops could now sell quite inexpensive goods that had come from further than Soho—from foreign countries. One day in 1860, someone bought a box of Finnish matches for fourpence at John Smith's, in High Street, Lincoln . . . and unwittingly provided the City & County Museum with an exhibit to be seen there a hundred years later, the tin matchbox from a factory in Finland which was destined to become the largest in that country. Nor is it the only early matchbox in the City and County Museum. Like many others, it had a design embossed in the tinplate:



Illustrated by courtesy of the City & County Museum, Lincoln - an early metal match box with design embossed in the lid; from London c. 1845.

no-one at that time had found a satisfactory way of printing on metal.

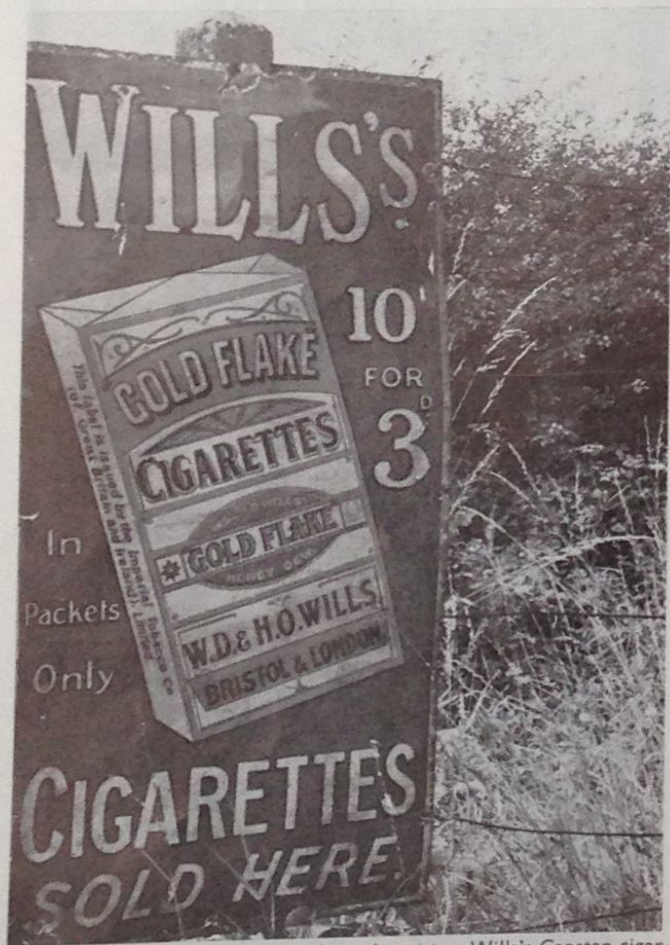
Not only the types of package in use in a given period, but the styles of package design and especially the pictures on the packs are an eloquent contribution to the social history of the period. The cartons for a local product which was launched in 1859 carried until recently a line illustration "supposed to represent the interior of a pharmacy at about the time the company was established". The product is Clarke's Blood Mixture; its first maker, Clarke, was a Lincoln pharmacist; the quotation is from the present proprietors, the Lincoln & Midland Counties Drug Co. Ltd. It is not certain whether this small but detailed picture was contemporary with the shopping scene depicted or was drawn later as a 'period piece'; but if it was a period piece, it must have been drawn by someone with a remarkable knowledge of the period and a high regard for accuracy, for the costumes of the people in the pharmacy have almost exact parallels in fashion plates of the early 1860's. It is also uncertain whether the design appeared first on bottle labels or on cartons, but the latter is unlikely as Clarke's Blood Mixture was on the market some years before the machine-made carton was invented.

### Entry of the folding box

This kind of pack—the carton or packet or folding box—is probably what most people think of first when the word 'packaging' is mentioned, and in our own century it has been the familiar container of products as various as Player's Navy Cut cigarettes and Kodak films; but it was a comparative latecomer on the packaging scene. Invented in America, it was brought across the Atlantic in 1887, Queen Victoria's jubilee year, by a former New York milliner with the sonorous name of Isaac Watts Parmenter. The firm which he established in London, the Britannia Folding Box Co. Ltd., issued a number of catalogues in the first few years of its existence, and some illustrations from them still exist: the 1897-8 catalogue included cartons for an intriguing range of 'goodies'—Ye Old Chelsea Goodies (literally), Persian sherbet and Turkish delight; and, more strictly relevant in the present context, Edinburgh rock packed by J. H. Bates of Boston, a grocer with a shop in Bargate at that time, remembered by very few Bostonians of today.

A few years ago, an enamelled sign was found in a Horncastle hedge bottom which advertised Will's Capstan cigarettes, "in Packets and Tins only", at ten for 2½d.—and included a large reproduction of the Capstan package design of 1908.

The fact that cartons had by then become a very



A similar enamelled sign to this, but advertising Will's Capstan cigarettes at ten for 2½d.—and illustrating the 1908 Capstan pack—was found in a hedge at Horncastle a few years ago.



## Some pioneers of Packaging . . . .

It was in 1881 that "William Rose of Gainsborough, in the County of Lincoln" first put his name to a patent application. For some reason now unknown, the application was not granted: he tried again, more successfully, in 1885. He had realised that if a tobacco packaging machine was really successful it would take the operation of packaging out of the retail shops and into the tobacco manufacturer's factory; so he had taken his invention to Henry Herbert Wills, of the famous Bristol firm of W. D. & H. O. Wills, and the patent was granted, a couple of months before Rose's 28th birthday, in their joint names. (Wills was later to renounce all claim to a share in it).

### Success at Cigarette packing

With such influential support, it was clear that William Rose was heading for success, but it was three years before the first Rose machine was sold (1888). Three or four years after that—when there was still no comparable machine in America—the neatness of the machine-wrapped packets in a Piccadilly shop window caught the eye of an American tobacco man, Richard Harvey Wright, on a visit to London. Wright quickly saw the merits of the British packaging system, made enquiries in the shop—and was in Gainsborough next day, talking with William Rose. The two men must have inspired confidence in each other, for in 1892 Wright acquired the exclusive North American rights in the Rose Tobacco Packer despite the fact that the inventor now had to modify the design of the machine so that it would wrap the tobacco into oblong, instead of cylindrical, packets, to meet the requirements of the American market.

From this point onwards, in a period of rising prosperity, it was reasonable to assume that William Rose's inventions would multiply and their field of usefulness would widen. This—with the inevitable ups and downs—they have continued to do, to such good purpose that if on holiday in France this year you bought one of the popular brands of French cigarettes, they might well have been put neatly into their packet by a Gainsborough-made machine. Even within the confines of the present article, i.e. by the early years of the present century, there are a number of milestones to record in the Rose company history . . .

### Butterscotch and black lead.

In 1893, no doubt encouraged by his American success, William Rose bought a piece of ground on the Trent bank which was so rough and prairie-like that it was known locally as 'Manitoba'; and here, five years later, he was to build his first Albion Works, the nucleus of the much larger premises known by the same name today. In 1894 he patented the 'blue machine', which went into production in 1896. It was *not* an experiment in the more cheerful colouring of factory plant, but a famous blue bleach, made at Hull, needed a rectangular machine first designed for packing Reckitt's Blue. This pack, and Rose's ingenuity enabled it to be packaged mechanically for the first time. Other automatic packers were to follow for a variety of familiar products: black-lead in 1900; butterscotch in the same year (Doncaster, after all, is not far from the Gainsborough edge of Lincolnshire); chocolate in 1903.

## Lincolnshire Quiz.

BY T. H. SWALES

All the answers are connected with the County.

1. Where can you still walk under a Roman archway?
2. Which is reputedly the oldest inhabited house in England?
3. Where did King John die?
4. Which king was born in Lincolnshire?
5. Where are there statues of Edward I and his two queens?
6. Where is there a university gateway?
7. Which Lord Chancellor founded a school in his native parish?
8. Which was the only monastic order founded in England?
9. Why were two Lincolnshire abbots executed in the same year?
10. What important discovery was due to an incident with an apple tree?
11. Who preached a sermon from his father's tombstone in the churchyard?
12. What is the name of the strait between Tasmania and Australia, and why is it so called?

### Answers

1. In Lincoln, Newport arch at the end of Bailgate.
2. The Jew's house, on The Stray at Lincoln.
3. At Swineshead Priory.
4. Henry IV at Old Bolingbroke.
5. At Lincoln Cathedral, Edward and Queen Eleanor on the easternmost buttress of the retro-choir aisle and Margaret of Valois on the next buttress.
6. At Stamford, Brasenose College gateway, where a scession from Oxford took place in 1333.
7. William of Wainfleet, at Wainfleet. The building is still standing.
8. The Gilbertines, founded by Gilbert of Sempringham in the twelfth century.
9. The abbots of Kirksaid and Barning were executed for taking part in the Lincolnshire Rising of 1536.
10. The Force of Gravity was said to have been discovered by Sir Isaac Newton when sitting in a garden at Woolsthorpe in 1665.
11. John Wesley when refused permission to preach by his father's successor at Epworth, in 1742.
12. Bass Strait, because first explored by George Bass (born at Aswarby) in 1797.

Meanwhile, in 1895, William Rose had married and had taken his brother, a blacksmith, into partnership in the packaging machinery business. A limited company, Rose Brothers (Gainsborough) Ltd., was formed in 1906, and at this time Roses' assets were valued at nearly £50,000, an even more useful sum of money then than now.

We can regard the formation of that company as the turning point between historic past and modern times. William Rose lived until 1929, and his son Alfred was head of the business for many years after that. One of the people who remembers the founder is Mr. Thomas H. Phillipson, who was works director at Albion Works until recently and is still retained as a consultant by Rose Forgrove. The present writer is indebted to him for many facts about the early years of the firm.

Events of the last half-century, besides changing the face of the world, have abundantly justified William Rose's belief that there was "something in" packaging.