

## OWNERSHIP STAMPING OF BOOKS

by JAMES D. STEWART

*Islington Public Libraries, London.*

*Ownership Marking.* — In practically every library which is used by the public or by a large number of persons, it is found necessary to adopt some form of marking the books in order to establish definite ownership. As a general rule, stamps of various sorts are employed for this purpose. Most libraries also use book-plates inside the front boards; but in only one case reported are stamps abandoned in favour of small labels distributed throughout the books.

### STAMPS

*Rubber Stamps.* — The stamps used by a large majority of libraries are made of rubber. No doubt this is owing principally to the extensive commercial use of rubber stamps, and partly to the fact that rubber stamps are cheaper than other kinds. Notwithstanding this large use of rubber stamps for the ownership marking of books, they are generally found to be unsatisfactory. When new, they give a clear impression, but the face of the stamp wears rapidly, and the result is a blurred and smeared impression which is not only unsatisfactory but unsightly. Even when new, considerable care has to be taken in order to obtain a good result. The use of rubber stamps for permanent ownership marking is gradually decreasing, and the results of this enquiry seem to indicate that their use should be confined to the stamping of ephemeral matter.

*Metal Stamps.* — An increasing number of libraries are

using stamps made of steel or brass in preference to those made of rubber. Although more expensive in the first place, these metal stamps are much more durable, and unless accidentally defaced are practically permanent. As a rule, the size of the impression of a metal stamp is smaller than that of a rubber one, and this, combined with the material, results in a much neater and clearer mark. Less care, also is necessary to obtain good results. Another important factor in the increasing use being made of metal stamps is that a good permanent ink (printers' or endorsing) is more readily applied by their means. There is not very much practical difference between steel and brass as a material for stamps.

*Perforating Stamps.* — In preference to using a stamp giving an ink impression, a number of libraries use a die which punches out the name of the library in a series of small holes similar to the perforations between postage-stamps. This method has the advantage of marking the page in an exceedingly permanent manner, but it has been found that the portion perforated is liable to be damaged by tearing along the perforations. In frequent instances the entire piece within the perforations has been torn out. It is also difficult to apply this mark anywhere but near the edge of a page. Chiefly owing to these reasons, this form of stamp is used in fewer places than any other form.

*Embossing Stamps.* — Next to the rubber stamp, this variety is most popular. It embosses a blind impression on the page, and has great permanency combined with small disfiguration of the book. It has been found in some cases, however, that if the impression is contained within a circle or other regular figure, that the portion embossed is liable to drop out and leave a hole where the stamp should be. With a suitable die, and with care in its application, this defect can generally be avoided. The difficulty found with the perforating stamp of applying the stamp anywhere but near the edge of a page also applies to some degree to the embossing stamp. A number of libraries use an embossing stamp for valuable books and for plates or illustrations, utilising an ordinary stamp with an ink impression for general use.

## STAMPS ON BOOK COVERS

About 60 % of British libraries use an ownership stamp of some kind on the outside of book covers. Sometimes this takes the form of a gilt or blind stamp applied by the binder when books are put into library binding, and sometimes it is applied at the library to all books by means of a hand press. These marks can only be got rid of by rebinding the books, so that they form an effective display of ownership and have a considerable power to prevent theft. The use of the hand press for blind-stamping on book covers is becoming more general, and it has the advantage of being considerably less expensive than gilt stamping. By its means every book can be stamped as soon as it is added to the library.

## SHAPES AND SIZES OF STAMPS

Many shapes of stamp impressions are in use — the most general being round, oval and oblong. In size, impressions range from  $7/16$  of an inch to two inches. From an examination of the various impressions and their application, the following conclusions have been derived. For all impressions, a *circular* form is best. With the rectangular and oval forms it is necessary to take care to get the impression upright on the page, otherwise it looks unsightly. With a circular impression this does not matter so much, as it will always look upright and neat. A clear impression is also more easily obtained from a small circular stamp than from other forms.

The best size of impression for general use is  $3/4$  of an inch in diameter. If a metal stamp, the usual surrounding line should be omitted, but in the case of a rubber stamp it is advisable to retain it. An impression of this size is quite clear without being obtrusive, and can frequently be used in positions where those of larger size could not be applied. In all cases a fine-faced type should be employed. If a blind cover-stamp is used, the die should be about  $1\ 1/2$  inches in diameter. This should also be circular, and should have no surrounding lines.

### INKS

The question of the kind of ink to use for stamping books is perhaps the most important part of this enquiry. It is also the part about which it is most difficult to obtain information of value. At the present time the majority of libraries use an aniline ink. This is partly due to the employment of rubber stamps, partly to the fear of «set off» or smudging, and partly to the number and cheapness of aniline ink stamping-pads on the market. Unfortunately, aniline ink is not permanent, and its impression can be removed by several means with more or less ease.

One large library uses a kind of paint applied with a metal stamp, but this is another method which is not satisfactory and can hardly become general.

Printing ink is obviously the best, but owing to its oily nature it is liable to smear and takes some time to dry. The kind of printing ink used by the Post Office for stamping their post-marks, is as near to the ideal as we have got at present. It is not so oily as ordinary printing ink, and dries practically at once; but in order to use this or any similar ink successfully it must be applied by means of a metal stamp with *fine-faced* type. This impression cannot be effaced without removing the paper, and the ink, if used as noted above, does not «set off» or smear.

### SYSTEMS OF OWNERSHIP MARKING

A great many libraries adopt some systematic method of marking books, usually by stamping on a certain fixed page or series of pages. For example in one library all books may be stamped on the title-page, top of preface or contents page, beginning of text, pages 50, 100, 150, etc., and end of text. The beginning and end of the text should always be stamped, as this provides a ready means of ascertaining whether a book is generally complete or not. The idea is gaining ground that for ordinary books profuse stamping is unnecessary. Six stamps for a volume, plus stamps on all full-page illustrations, is a fair average.

*Illustrations.* — Nearly all libraries stamp or mark every

full-page plate or illustration. As a general rule the ordinary stamp is used for the purpose, but a few libraries use a special stamp. Several, for example, use an ink stamp for ordinary purposes, and an embossing stamp for plates. Others use a special small stamp; and one a small roller stamp which prints the name of the library in a straight line on the bottom margin immediately under the print.

The aim to be achieved in marking plates for public ownership should be to destroy their commercial value without destroying their artistic value. A small stamp, either printing ink or embossed, which slightly encroaches on the surface of the print seems to be the most effective method. Stamping on the backs of illustrations, as is done in many places, is quite useless for the prevention of theft.

### SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

*Stamp.* — A metal stamp giving a circular impression  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch in diameter, composed of a fine-faced type and without enclosing lines.

*Ink.* — Printing ink (Post Office stamping ink).

*Stamping.* — Stamp title-page, beginning and end of text, and at least one fixed page. Stamp all full-page illustrations on the front, letting the stamp encroach slightly on the print.

*Cover Stamping.* — Use a blind stamp, 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter, which can be applied at the library by means of a small hand press.