

# Stamping their way through 140 years

**Jenny Hawkins**, Group Sales and Marketing Director (Personal Impressions and Country Love Crafts), explores the history and future of the EM Richford Group

## It is a special time, celebrating the 140th anniversary, could you supply a brief history of the company.

The owner of Personal Impressions and the EM Richford Group is Andrew Richford. Andrew is the fourth generation Richford to have ownership of the company.

The Company formed 140 years ago in 1878 when Edwin Miller Richford (a chemist) started manufacturing rubber stamps in East London. The business quickly developed and grew into one of the largest stamp makers in the UK. At its peak it wasn't unusual to generate sales of £200,000 to £300,000 per month on commercial rubber stamps alone.

Since its formation the company has changed. This was due to advancements in technology and the evolution of the greeting card market. The biggest change started in the 1980s when consumers wanted to send something different from the standard offering of greeting cards. As such, the craft of hand-making greeting cards became popular and rubber stamps were designed and sold with the hobbyist in mind.

In addition to manufacturing finished stamps, the company also became the foremost supplier of components and raw materials to other rubber stamp makers in this country and overseas.

The craft division of EM Richford, Personal Impressions, started in 1995. Personal

Impressions was one of the UK's first craft brand managers and today we still distribute some of the original brands, some of which are still exclusive.

## HOW WILL YOU CELEBRATE THIS MILESTONE?

There will be an exciting year ahead and we intend to celebrate by offering a number of special offers and promotions.

## WHAT IS THE BACKGROUND OF ANDREW RICHFORD?

Personal Impressions/EM Richford has always been a family-run business. Andrew Richford (the great, great nephew of the Company's founder) began working for the business aged 21 and still works full-time in the business today. Initially Andrew managed some of the smaller satellite offices in Walthamstow, Leicester, Byfleet and London. In later years Andrew worked from the main building in Sudbury, Suffolk.

## WHAT HAVE BEEN THE PAST SUCCESSES OF THE COMPANY?

The world is in a constant state of change so the past and future success of our business has been, and still is, our ability to be resilient and adapt. Over the years we have been able to quickly respond to market change. We have adapted from local shopping to regional and from national to global. We have

seen the demise of specialty shops (due to larger stores) and adjusted to changes in purchase patterns - namely from

Typesetters pictured from the 1970s



those made in store to those bought through TV shopping channels, on the internet and more recently mobile devices.

In the past, the company also bought smaller businesses (from existing suppliers) to ensure the production and supply chains remained intact for all involved.

A more tangible past success, and one of Personal Impressions' busiest times, was when the company was instrumental in providing craft stock (ranging from 1,000-10,000 kits per show) for the TV Shopping Channel QVC. Nowadays TV shopping channels tend to have their own sourcing and buying teams.

## WHAT PLANS DO YOU HAVE FOR FUTURE?

More and more of our competitors are manufacturing their own-brand products whilst we will continue to represent some of the more recognised "labels" within the industry.

## ARE THERE ANY BIG THINGS IN THE WORKS?

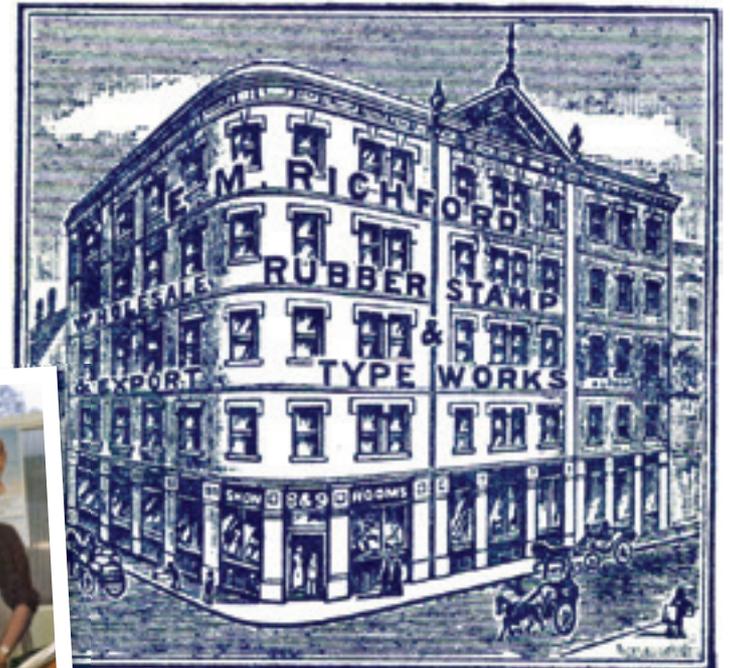
Personal Impressions have been working behind the scenes on a new website with improved content, search and filter functionality. In 2018 we intend to launch our new site via a multi-phased approach.

## ARE THERE ANY ADDITIONS TO STAFF?

We have always had a loyal workforce with many people working at the company for over 30 years, some over 40. This means that we don't often have to consider replacing staff but recruit extra as and when the demand necessitates it.

## NEW DESIGNS OR PRODUCTS ETC?

We represent nearly 70 brands and so there is a plentiful supply of new products in the pipeline. Established brands have the knowledge, expertise



Richford's Snow Hill (London EC1) building



Vulcanising Press - the old machinery used for stamp-making.

and experience to produce better quality products than those that are new to the manufacturing scene and we always look forward to learning about product development from the labels we represent.

## PLANS FOR GROWTH?

In 2018 we will add some exciting brands to our portfolio. Personal Impressions have been recognised as one of the UK's leading "brand managers" and there are definitely some impressive collaborations in the pipeline. We recognise that the retail industry is changing for the UK. As such, we will be working with industry experts on new and creative ways to educate and inspire both businesses and consumers.

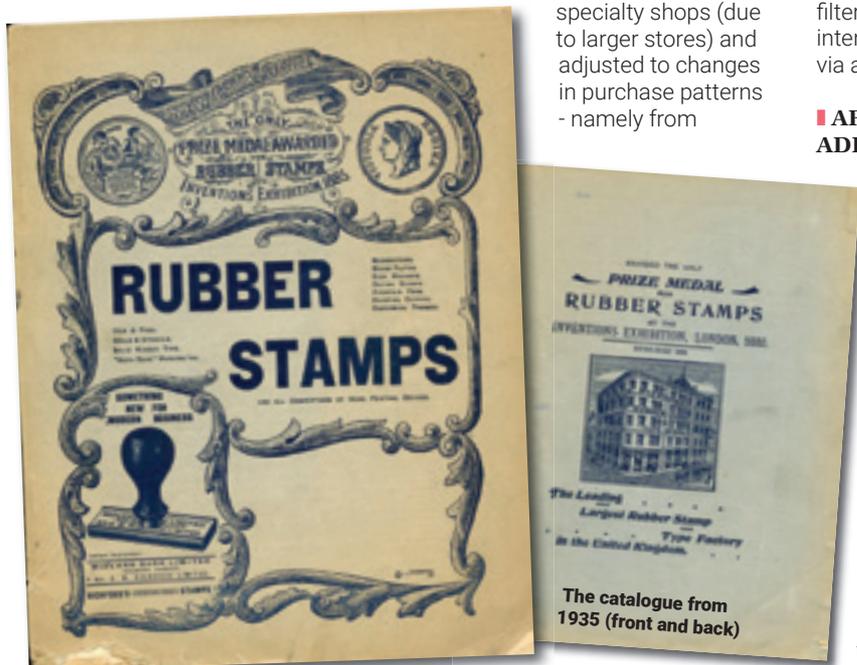
## BRAND ETHOS?

Our longevity in business, established infrastructure and

our experienced, reputable brand database makes Personal Impressions stand out - this is our brand ethos and unique selling point.

## WHAT ISSUES DO YOU SEE AS HAVING THE BIGGEST IMPACTS ON YOUR INDUSTRY IN THE YEAR AHEAD?

According to forecasts by the Centre for Retail Research the number of shops across the UK is expected to fall by 22 per cent in 2018 involving the loss of 22,600 stores and 140,000 jobs. Therefore, we foresee online shopping making the biggest impact in our industry this year. Shoppers are looking for speedy access to information and convenient shopping. Social media is also gaining importance so our customers, and the craft industry as a whole, need to go digital in order to survive.



The catalogue from 1935 (front and back)