

# TIMELINE HISTORY OF HENRY C. STEPHENS LTD

## THE STEPHENS' INK COMPANY

- 1796** (March) Birth of **Henry Stephens** in Holborn, London, the second son of Joseph Stephens (1771–1820) and his wife Catherine (1763–1843), née Farey
- 1801** The Stephens family moves to the *Bull Inn*, **Redbourn**, Hertfordshire, where Joseph Stephens becomes landlord
- 1811** Young Henry Stephens is apprenticed to a local doctor in Markyate, Hertfordshire
- 1815** **Henry Stephens** attends Guy's and St Thomas' Medical School; he shares rooms at 28 St Thomas Street, London with **John Keats** and **George Wilson Mackereth**
- 1817–1828** Dr Stephens runs a medical and veterinary practice in Redbourn
- 1820** (29 January) Death of King George III
- 1829** The doctor relocates his medical practice to London and conducts experiments on inks and wood stains in a laboratory close to his home at 54 Stamford Street. In the years that follow he works to perfect and patent an **indelible writing fluid** that writes blue and dries black
- 1830** (26 June) Death of King George IV. Competitors **P & J Arnold**, founded in 1724, introduce "Arnold's blue-black Chemical Writing Fluid" despite objections by Dr Stephens
- 1831** Dr Stephens publishes an acclaimed **treatise on the treatment of hernia**
- 1832** **Stephens' Ink Company** is registered at 54 Lower Stamford Street, **Southwark**
- 1837** (28 March) **First Stephens patents granted** for inks, pens and inkstands
- 1837** (20 June) Death of King William IV
- 1838** Advertisement in Robson's London Directory informs "the writing public" of "**Stephens's Patent Writing Fluids**" in Carbonaceous Black, Dark Blue, Light Blue and Brilliant Red with the warning that "The Penalties for infringing a Patent lie against the Vendor as well as the Maker". The ink is sold in bottles at 6d., 1s., and 3s. each, by Stationers and Booksellers
- 1838** (28 June) Coronation of Queen Victoria
- 1840** **Introduction of the Penny Post** stimulates demand for writing materials
- 1840** (May) Marriage of **Dr Henry Stephens** to Anne O'Reilly at St Andrew's Church, Holborn
- 1841** (2 February) Birth of **Henry Charles Stephens** at 71 York Road, Lambeth, south London
- 1846** Dr Henry Stephens moves with his family to Grove House, Ballards Lane, **Finchley**, north London; ink production remains at premises in Stamford Street although research and experiments on ink and wood stains are continued in outbuildings at Grove House
- 1849** Dr Stephens publishes a **treatise on the analysis and treatment of cholera**
- 1851** The company participates in the **Great Exhibition** in Hyde Park, London, displaying existing products and innovations such as a "Fountain Ink-Holder"; address shown as **54 Lower Stamford Street**, Blackfriars Road, London
- 1852** The company advertises ink and writing fluids, wood stains, patent propelling pencils, parallel rulers, patent stamp and label dampers and claims to be "Patronized by His Royal Highness Prince Albert and the Royal Family" and other European royals
- 1856** The company takes offices at **18 St Martin's-le-Grand**, London, but is soon ousted by redevelopment for a new GPO headquarters building
- 1860** The company finds a new home at **171 Aldersgate Street**; manufacturing continues in Southwark at Princes Street premises (now Coin Street). 19-year-old **Henry Charles Stephens** joins the company full-time, after study at the School of Mines
- 1861** An American advertisement for **Stephens' wood stains** quotes the company's Agent as C. J. Reilly with an office at 275 Pearl Street, **New York City**
- 1863** (28 April) **Marriage** of **Henry Charles Stephens** to Margaret Agnes Mackereth, daughter of George Wilson Mackereth (*see 1815 above*)
- 1864** (15 September) Sudden death of **Dr Henry Stephens** at Farringdon Station, London; his son **Henry C. Stephens** (aged 23) takes over management of the company which is a partnership; his mother and his mother's sister Ellen are the legal partners
- 1865** Birth of Henry C. Stephens' son, Henry O'Reilly Stephens
- 1866** Ink and wood stain experiments continue in outhouses at Grove Lodge in Finchley
- 1867** **Henry C. Stephens**, "Chemist", awarded **Silver Medal** for Writing Inks at the Exposition Universelle at the Champ de Mars in **Paris**, France
- 1868** **Henry Charles Stephens** becomes a legal partner in the Stephens' Ink company
- 1869** Birth of Henry C. Stephens' second son **Michael Edmund Stephens**

- 1869–1885** Stephens' products win **8 Gold Medals** and **11 Silver Medals** at international exhibitions in Le Havre, Lyons, Vienna, Philadelphia, Paris, Boston (USA), Sydney, Melbourne, Christchurch (NZ), Amsterdam, Calcutta and Antwerp; company's trademark 'inkspot' is recognised worldwide
- 1870** The company offices at 171 are renumbered to **191 Aldersgate Street**
- 1872** Manufacturing moves from Southwark to **275½ Holloway Road**, north London, adjacent to Holloway Road tube station; offices later relocate (1898) to **57 Aldersgate Street**
- 1874** Stephens' family purchases for £1950 and moves to **Avenue House**, East End Road, **Finchley**
- 1884** Henry C. Stephens buys **Cholderton Lodge** and 823 acres of farmland to establish his estate at **Cholderton**, on the Hampshire–Wiltshire border
- 1885** Henry C. Stephens' younger son **Michael**, aged 16, joins the company
- 1886** (15 May) Birth of **Harold Edric Stephens**, Henry C. Stephens' nephew, in Pretoria, **South Africa**
- 1887** **Henry C. Stephens**, by now known affectionately as **'Inky'**, is elected **Conservative MP** for Hornsey and Finchley with a majority of 1,988 votes; he is known to be an abstainer and supporter of the temperance movement
- 1888** Henry Charles Stephens is admitted to the Freedom and Livery of the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers
- 1889** Further purchase of 1,015 acres of farmland at **Cholderton**; Henry C. Stephens becomes **Lord of the Manor**. His holdings would later exceed 5,000 acres
- 1889** The company buys land in Gillespie Road, **Highbury**, north London from the Great Northern Railway Co for future manufacturing premises; railway sidings from the adjacent main line are later added for freight purposes
- 1892** Manufacturing moves to the new purpose-built factory at **Gillespie Road**, Highbury, N5, close to Arsenal football ground and adjacent to Arsenal Underground station. The factory is designed by Henry Stephens' son **Michael** and has an illuminated chimney bearing the name STEPHENS
- 1892** **Henry C. Stephens** is re-elected to Parliament for a second term
- 1894** **Michael Stephens**, aged 25, becomes a partner in his father's company
- 1896** The RMS *Drummond Castle* disaster. **Henry Stephens'** brother **Harold** is **drowned**, as are his wife and daughter, when returning from Cape Town. Their ship founders off Ushant, Brittany with heavy loss of life. Harold Stephens was a solicitor in Durban and had established an export office for Stephens' products in that city
- 1898** The company offices are established at **57 Aldersgate Street**
- 1900** **Henry C. Stephens** resigns as MP on a point of principle and opposition to the Boer War
- 1901** (22 January) Death of Queen Victoria
- 1904** Henry C. Stephens, aged 63, suffers a bout of ill-health. He begins to spend more and more time at his country estate in **Cholderton**
- 1906** Henry Stephens' nephew **Gerald**, son of brother Harold who drowned in 1896, joins the family company
- 1908** Following his marriage to Louise Oudin, **Michael Stephens** buys woodland near Peaslake in Surrey to create an estate with a new country house and gardens known as Coverwood; he retains a London house at 74 Portland Place
- 1910** (6 May) Death of King Edward VII
- 1910** **Stephens' products** are chosen to accompany Captain Robert Scott on the ill-fated **Terra Nova Expedition** to reach the **South Pole**
- 1911** Stephens' products are chosen for the **Australasian Antarctic Expedition** led by Australian Sir Douglas Mawson
- 1915** During WWI **Avenue House** is requisitioned as a hospital for injured servicemen, remaining after 1918 under the control of the Air Ministry for another seven years, from 1919 becoming the Central Hospital of the Royal Air Force
- 1918** (8 July) **Death of Henry Charles Stephens**, aged 77; his final act of philanthropy is to leave his **Avenue House estate** "to the people of Finchley". The house is still (until 1925) a military hospital and is later used by many organisations, including a school, a public library and as council offices and ARP fire-watching headquarters during WWII
- 1919** (28 June) **The Treaty of Versailles**, bringing a formal end to World War I, is signed using **Stephens' indelible blue-black ink**

- 1925** (May) **Henry C. Stephens Ltd** is incorporated as a **public company** trading as **Stephens' Inks**; **Gerald Stephens** is appointed Managing Director and share capital is £850,000. Gross profit for the year amounts to **£ 97,326** (**£5 million** in today's money)
- 1926** **Michael Stephens resigns** as a Director, citing wish for "freedom from business responsibilities"
- 1928** (23 August) **Death of Major Gerald Stephens**, on a polo field. He is succeeded as MD by his brother **Harold Edric Stephens**, aged 42, also a nephew of Henry C. Stephens
- 1929** **Compagnie des Encres Stephens** is founded in **Paris** as a French ink manufacturing company; offices and factory are at 37 rue Deguingand, Levallois-Perret (Seine), in the French capital's northern suburbs
- 1929** An offer is made by **Stephens' Inks** to acquire the rival London ink-manufacturing firm of long-established competitor **P & J Arnold Ltd.**, also based in Aldersgate Street
- 1930** Average **annual gross profit** of the company for the last five years is **£97,000**. **Stephens' Inks (Australia) Pty** is registered with offices and factory in **Sydney, Australia**
- 1932** **Henry C. Stephens Ltd** acquires Meeks Inks of New Zealand and takes over their factory in **Dunedin, New Zealand**
- 1935** The company introduces a range of **fountain pens** with 14ct gold nibs; first model is designated Stephens 106, the code for a selling price of ten shillings and sixpence. Average **annual gross profit** of the company for the last five years is **£85,050**
- 1936** (20 January) Death of King George V; (11 December) Abdication of King Edward VIII. Button-filler pens 56 and 76 introduced; selling price 5/6 and 7/6, respectively
- 1936** **Death of Michael Stephens** aged 77 at the Palacio Hotel, Estoril, Portugal
- 1937** "Deluxe model" fountain pen number 21 introduced; selling price one guinea (21 shillings)
- 1938** Practical and innovatively-shaped **Fillpen ink bottle** introduced
- 1939** The company introduces picture-mounting adhesive **Grip-fix**, sold in airtight aluminium containers from threepence to two shillings and sixpence. In **Paris**, Marcel Bich, the future inventor of the disposable Bic ballpoint pen, razor and cigarette lighter, is appointed Director of Marketing at **Encres Stephens** in Paris
- 1940** Henry C. Stephens Ltd introduces patented '**Leverfil**' **fountain pens** containing an internal sac. Despite the **outbreak of WWII**, the company's **average annual gross profit** for the last five years is **£76,328** (**£3.6 million** in today's money)
- 1941** The company's Head Office at 57 Aldersgate Street is destroyed by enemy bombing; staff relocate offices to **Gillespie Road** factory premises, telephone: CANonbury 4455, cable address: INK, LONDON. The premises of **P & J Arnold Ltd** are also destroyed
- 1942** **Harold Edric Stephens**, nephew of Henry "Inky" Stephens, is appointed a Director of **P & J Arnold Ltd** as this blitzed company is merged with Henry C. Stephens Ltd. From now on Arnold's sells both companies' products direct to customers while Stephens handles exports and supplies a countrywide network of retailers. Arnold's factory is in **Benwell Road, N7**, close to the Stephens factory and offices in **Gillespie Road, N5**
- 1945** **End of WWII**. Despite all the difficulties, and the destruction of the company's offices by enemy action in 1941, **Henry C. Stephens Ltd** has traded very successfully during the six war years, with **gross profits** exceeding **£74,000** each year (**£3 million** in today's money)
- 1946** New **deluxe model fountain pen** introduced, named "Royale". Stephens' pens are made by a number of manufacturers, but mainly by the Lang Pen Company of Liverpool
- 1947** The company receives **£7,466** from the War Damage Commission as compensation for the damage caused by enemy action. The Annual Report states that factories are operating successfully in **Australia, New Zealand, South Africa** and **France**, and that a company has been formed in **Chile**. In **France**, the company advertises Stephens' fountain pens made by a company in Grenoble
- 1948** **Problems arise** due to increased competition, rise in cost of raw materials, the loss of the **Argentine** export market due to exchange controls, and political problems in India causing losses and delays in plans to open a factory in **Calcutta**.
- 1949** A **Stephens'** outdoor **advertising thermometer** features in the opening and closing sequences of Ealing Studios' famous film comedy *Passport to Pimlico*
- 1950** (September) Death of **Harold Edric Stephens**. The **French** subsidiary company makes a loss and the **Australian** subsidiary company is sold; net profit has dropped to **£15,056** from £22,326 the previous year

- 1951** Stephens' product range now has **150 different kinds of ink** but commercial use is declining due mechanisation, although **carbon paper** and **typewriter ribbons** are selling well
- 1952** (6 February) Death of King George VI. The company introduces '**micro-filtered**' ink in four washable 'radiant colours': blue-black, radiant blue, scarlet and green, all priced at seven pence per bottle; net trading profit has dropped to **£11,916** (**£290,000** in today's money)
- 1953** (2 June) Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Directors of **Henry C. Stephens Ltd** are listed as J H F Guy (Chairman), L Bagrit (Vice Chairman), F H R Turney (Managing), E W Dancaster (Deputy Managing), M G Talbot Rice and E W Brown. The company is barely profitable and the **French** subsidiary is in liquidation after heavy losses
- 1954** After reorganisation, directors are now Leon Bagrit (Chairman), E W Brown (Managing) and M G Talbot-Rice; net trading profit is **£18,179**
- 1955** E W Brown retires and a new Managing Director K B Robinson is appointed; a new '**inkblot**' logo is introduced and net profit for the year is **£11,713**
- 1956** £105,000 has been spent on **capital re-equipment** over the last three years and a further £7,000 invested in the **South African** subsidiary; net profit rises to **£19,448**
- 1957** The Annual Report says that the company has recovered from the situation four years ago when "Dividends had not been paid for years, the factories were ill-equipped, the products poorly presented and the pre-eminence of the company in its section of the stationery field largely lost"; net profit improves to **£21,099**
- 1958** Goodman & Vandervieren Ltd, manufacturers of Vanguard stapling machines and staples, is taken over; net profit for the year declines to **£18,312**
- 1959** Chairman Leon Bagrit retires and Managing Director K B Robinson becomes Chairman; net profit improves to **£41,602** (**£820,000** in today's money)
- 1960** A new subsidiary company, **H C S Plastics**, is formed, to manufacture "flat plastic articles" (wallets, binders, document cases); net profit **£47,099**
- 1961** (March) American company **LePage's Ltd**, manufacturers of gum mucilage and adhesives, is acquired for cash and the **Gillespie Road factory is modernised**. The Company now has **400 employees** and is manufacturing writing, drawing and marking inks of all descriptions, industrial inks, fountain pen ink, stamp pads and endorsing inks, adhesives and gum mucilage, adhesive tapes, stapling machines, typewriter ribbons, chalks, crayons and sealing wax; the factory has its own rail sidings. The Annual Report shows ten subsidiary companies, including those in **New Zealand, India, South Africa** and **Chile**, and a group net profit for the year of **£42,871** (**£810,000** in today's money)
- 1962** College Crayon Co Ltd, supplier of chalk and crayons, is taken over. Subsidiaries in **New Zealand** and **South Africa** are unprofitable. The company exhibits for the first time at the **Hanover Trade Fair** and the **Brussels International Fair**. The sales force is strengthened by the addition of fifteen merchandisers with mini-vans
- 1963** Group Sales Manager N R Dix is appointed to the Board on 1 January. Trading conditions are getting difficult – the 1963 Annual Report shows group **net profit** at **£16,365** compared with £42,871 in 1961 and £31,235 in 1962
- 1964** (17 January) **An offer is made** by the **Equity Corporation** of Delaware, USA, for the whole of the company's Ordinary Shares at ten shillings per share. **The offer is accepted** by 67 percent of shareholders four weeks later. The directors are shown as D M Milton (USA), Sir Theodore Constantine, K B Robinson (resigned 1 October), N R Dix and D H Moseley. In October the **Waterman Pen Co Limited is taken over**. **Net profit declines** to **£11,154**
- 1965** Manufacturing moves a short distance from **Gillespie Road** to former Express Dairy cake factory at **100–112 Drayton Park**, London N5. Directors are Sir Theodore Constantine, N R Dix, M F Meissner (USA) and E J Bouvard (USA). **Losses** for the year amount to **£199,842**
- 1966** The acquisition of Waterman Pens has not proved profitable. In April seven wholly-owned Stephens' subsidiaries are placed in **voluntary liquidation**: Goodman & Vandervieren, G H J Hughes, JayJex, Coronet Manufacturing, College Crayon Company, Grip-Fix and LePage's. Steps are also taken to **liquidate** the subsidiaries in **Chile** and **India**. **Losses** for the year are slightly lower at **£138,689** (**£2.18 million** in today's money)
- 1967** (28 June) **Henry C. Stephens Ltd** and associated and subsidiary companies including P & J Arnold and Waterman Pens **are acquired** by the **Royal Sovereign Pencil Company Ltd** (founded in 1920). Dock strikes in London and Liverpool in September disrupt export orders

- 1968** After further takeovers, the **Royal Sovereign Group** now comprises 33 companies plus eight overseas subsidiaries
- 1969** Total turnover of the Royal Sovereign Group is £4,150,658 of which 12 percent (£507,370) is comprised of **exports to 104 countries** worldwide
- 1970** Stephens' Drayton Park factory is wound down; **Royal Sovereign** continues to manufacture **Stephens' Blue-Black Record Ink** (Registrar's Ink) and other Stephens' products at its factory on an industrial estate in White Hart Lane, Tottenham, London N22
- 1972** The old **Gillespie Road factory is demolished** and the site given over to local-authority housing and a nature park. Royal Sovereign increases its shareholding in **Stephens Inks (N.Z.) Ltd** to 97 percent
- 1973** Royal Sovereign acquires the minority 30 percent shareholding in **Henry C. Stephens Pty. Limited (South Africa)** making that subsidiary wholly owned
- 1974** Royal Sovereign installs its first computer, a Singer 10; profits are up by 29 percent
- 1975** Due to Indian government restrictions on non-trading companies, Stephens Inks Ltd in **India** is placed in voluntary liquidation. UK economic and political problems in 1974 cause profits to fall by thirty percent to **£477,358 (£3.39 million** in today's money)
- 1978** The **Dickinson Robinson Group (DRG)** – a conglomerate formed by the 1966 merger of John Dickinson Ltd (paper manufacturers) and E S & A Robinson Ltd of Bristol (packaging manufacturers) – takes over **Royal Sovereign Group Ltd**
- 1985** Stephens' Drayton Park factory is finally closed; production ceases of Stephens Registrar's Ink
- 1986** The redundant Drayton Park factory chimney is demolished; the site is sold and later redeveloped as apartments
- 1989** (15 May) Destruction of east wing of **Avenue House, Finchley**, by fire; "Inky" Stephens' old first-floor laboratory is gutted – a few artefacts and company record books are saved. **The Finchley Society** resolves to preserve the Stephens archive and items that remain. **Asset-stripper Roland Franklin** (Pembridge Investments) **acquires DRG** (including Royal Sovereign) with a leveraged buyout worth £900 million
- 1990** The **Royal Sovereign Group** including remaining **Stephens'** products **is sold** to the **Mitsubishi Pencil Company** of Japan (founded 1887) to form the basis of their new UK distribution network. Other parts of the DRG group are also sold off, some to Bowater's (now Rexam), some to Spicer's; **DRG ceases to exist**
- 1991** The New Zealand subsidiary, John Dickinson & Co (New Zealand) Ltd, is re-registered as Nontradorm (110) Ltd, a non-trading dormant company
- 1992** Paddy Musgrove and Norman Burgess of **The Finchley Society** make final arrangements to establish a **Stephens museum** in Avenue House, "Inky" Stephens' former home
- 1993** Opening of **The Stephens Collection** in **Avenue House** in Finchley, featuring the **history** of writing materials and of the **Stephens family** and the **Stephens' Ink company**
- 2001** **Avenue House Estate Management**, a charitable Trust, is created to take over management of **Avenue House** and grounds from the London Borough of Barnet which retains the freehold
- 2002** **West Design Products Limited** of Folkestone, Kent **acquires the Royal Sovereign Group** including remaining **Stephens' trademarks** from the Mitsubishi Pencil Company
- 2005** **BBC Radio 4** features the story of **Henry Charles Stephens** and **Stephens' Inks** in a half-hour documentary programme in the "History Today" series
- 2006** A number of **Stephens' products** are relaunched by **West Design Products Ltd** who continue to produce a range of **Stephens branded stationery items** including **Stephens' Black Drawing (Indian) Ink**
- 2013** **Old Stephens' ink bottles, thermometers and other artefacts** continue to be advertised for sale in antique shops and on internet auction sites, offered by sellers all over the world including **UK, USA, Canada, Germany, South America, India, Australia and New Zealand**; rare or unusual items are acquired where possible by **The Stephens Collection**
- 2014** It is announced that Avenue House Estate is to be renamed **Stephens House and Gardens** with rebranding, a new website and plans for continuing development.

*Timeline compiled by Stewart J Wild, Trustee of The Stephens Collection*

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