

Apples from the neighbor's garden - or: Stamps from the petty cash box

Snatching an apple from a neighbor's tree is harmless, although from a legal point of view this would also be theft (Fig.1). In contrast, there is also organized theft - in Vienna, for example, an organic winegrower has been complaining for years that thousands of grape leaves are stolen from his vines every year - stuffed grape leaves are supposed to be a delicacy. With the help of a greeting card from the good old days, we can clear up a supposed theft; obviously, reaching into the petty cash was widespread, because one stamp is said to have been the equivalent of a filled snack. Today, people hardly ever write letters, so a supply of stamps is also obsolete.

To prevent the theft of stamps, a resourceful Englishman, Joseph Sloper, invented a punching machine in 1867 with which one could mark paper with one's initials by punching holes. This was allowed by the post office and gradually the state postal administrations complied with the wishes of their customers and allowed the punching of holes in their stamps with which one could "personalize" one's stamps by means of shapes, figures or letters. A would-be thief would thus have been noticed when reaching into the drawer or mailing the letter. Certainly, many a company will also have attached importance to an advertising effect through a decorative envelope and a personalized stamp. We call such a stamp **Perfin** - composed of **Perforated Initials**.

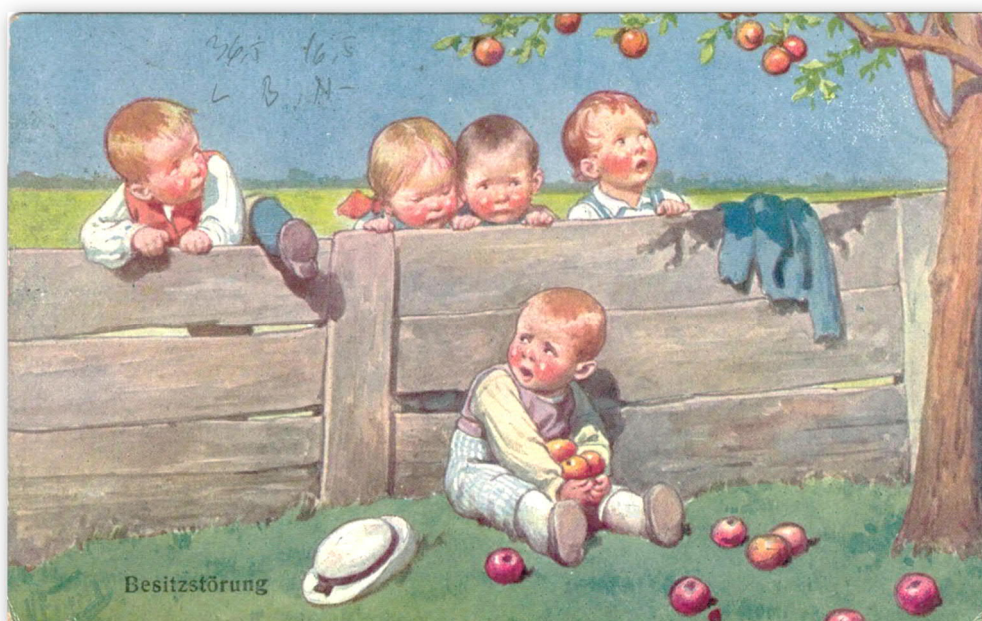


Fig. 1: It was tempting to link the title of the article to the image on the front of the item

This card is certainly not business correspondence in the usual sense - rather, it is a private card greeting used to wish a happy Easter in 1921. It is noteworthy that the card was posted overstamped, as the fee for a long-distance card would have been only 30 Pf. (instead of the affixed 60 Pf.). This makes the writer of the card suspicious, it could have been someone in the executive suite; the owner himself or a senior employee [which Wirecard employee could give us information about today's postal rates?]. And the sender surely thought, better to stick too much on than too little! We need to gather more circumstantial evidence!

Second, let's turn to the perforation: we assume that the punching machine was defective [the first letter may have been an F - at least with a dot; the second is undoubtedly a W with a dot]; but since the card

was written in Werl [see text box], we can narrow down the company. Similar to a fingerprint, we can compare our perforation with the database of the ARGE LOCHUNGEN and further narrow down the "circle of perpetrators": F. W. as Perfin used the companies Chemische Fabrik am Vorgebirge, Werl, and F. Wulf Presshefabrik und Branntwein-Brennerei, Werl. The perpetrator must therefore have had access to the petty cash at one of the two companies! By the way, the pilgrimage town Werl is located in NRW, district Soest.

In any case, the writer of the card did not post the card greeting at a post office, but inserted it into a letter card attached to a train. The mail was stamped on the train, sorted, and unloaded for distribution at the nearest station with a connection to a post office.

What would Julius, the recipient of the card, have thought if he had been a philatelist and had known the connections around the Perfins? It should also be noted that the German police also protected themselves from theft by pole-holing their stamp stocks. Around 1910, the first experiments with franking machines got underway in Bavaria; they subsequently became more and more popular and were approved throughout Germany in the 1920s (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2: Railway postmark [catalog number ARGE BAHNPOST H0043, type 7.3.1.0].
Train No. 390 Hagen - Altenbeken - Cassel from 26.3.1921



Fig. 3: Postmark from Leipzig 1922

I would like to thank Werner Hinze [ARGE BAHNPOST] and Arnold Lemmel [ARGE LOCHUNGEN] for their helpful hints.

Further literature: CATALOGUE OF ARGE LOCHUNGEN <http://arge-lochungen.de/> -
BUNDESARBEITSGEMEINSCHAFT BAHNPOST <http://www.uqp.de/bahnpost/>