

EDWARD STANLEY GIBBONS

Stanley Gibbons, the renowned international stamp dealers and publishers, have recently announced the opening of a new branch in the heart of Monte Carlo, a short distance from the world famous Casino. Stanley Gibbons Monaco S.A.M. is situated at 2 Avenue Henri Dunant, Monte Carlo, appropriately enough, opposite the Post Office.

Stanley Gibbons was founded in 1856 by Edward Stanley Gibbons (1840-1913), the son of a Plymouth chemist who had collected stamps from an early age and was so passionately fond of them to deal from.

From these humble beginnings developed a stamp business that soon exceeded the turnover of the pharmacy which, on the death of his father, the young Gibbons closed to enable him to concentrate on stamps alone. In 1863 a chance visit to the shop by two sailors resulted in the sale to Gibbons of a sack full of Cape Triangular stamps won in a raffle in Cape Town.

This sack, which he bought for £5, enabled Edward Stanley Gibbons to expand his business further and in 1874 he moved his stock and company to London, where he later, in 1891, established his premises in the famous Strand, where the company's headquarters are still to be found today.

The legendary story of this sack is told in a scarce history of the firm written and published early in this century by Charles J. Phillips, the Birmingham accountant who bought the firm of Stanley Gibbons in 1890 for £25,000 from its founder.

The story is recounted by him as follows:

"In 1863 Mr. Gibbons had one of the best transactions of his life, and the following are exact particulars I have got from him.

One morning two sailors passing the chemist's shop noticed the sheets of stamps in one of the windows and went inside and said: 'Do you buy used postage stamps?' On Mr. Gibbons replying in the affirmative, they said they had some on their ship and would bring them in.

Sure enough next day the men turned up, and one of them carried a kit-bag full of stamps over his shoulder.

They were asked into the back parlour, and turned out the contents of the bag on a large round table.

The stamps were all triangular Capes, thousands and thousands of them, many in large strips and blocks of eight or more — Perkins Bacon and Co's printings and woodblocks mixed up anyhow.

Mr. Gibbons, even in those early days, could not imagine how two sailors could have got a sackful of triangular Capes, and asked them for particulars:-

'When our boat got to Cape Town we had leave, and some of us went on shore for a spree, and me and my mate here happened to go in a show we found folks crowding into and found a bazaar going on. Some ladies persuaded us to

take a shilling ticket in a raffle, and we won this here bag of stamps, which the ladies had begged all round Cape Town for this bazaar.'

Well, the men were delighted to take a five-pound note for the lot, and departed highly pleased.....'

When Gibbons made this legendary purchase he was taking a considerable risk. Cape Triangulars were little known by collectors and he had no way of knowing whether or not they would catch on. However, fortunately collectors liked them and his gamble in paying £5 paid off. Today, single stamps from that sack could be worth as much as £20,000!

In the late 19th century, Edward Stanley Gibbons was selling stamps from the sack for prices like 3 shillings a dozen, 8 shillings a gross. The fact that he was selling them at such prices for a number of years, shows how big the sack must have been.

In July 1890 Gibbons sold his business for £25,000 — a fortune in those days — to a Birmingham businessman and spent the remainder of his life touring the world. One of his favourite places was the South of France and he spent much time in Monaco.

Today his memory is preserved in the Principality not only by the new shop bearing his name, but also in the gardens of the Musee Nationale and elsewhere, where beds of the attractive red rose named after his firm are to be found.

15 Treville Street, Plymouth, the historic address where in 1856 Gibbons started his stamp business from a counter in his father's chemist's shop, was destroyed during World War II bombing raid. However, the premises to which Gibbons moved his thriving concern in 1870 — No 8 Locyer Street, The Hoe, Plymouth — still stands and the Plymouth City Council recently announced that they are to put up a plaque on this building to the memory of the world's best known stamp dealer.