

Textile Trade Tickets

In the late nineteenth century, the Turkey-Red industry in the Vale of Leven was dominated by William Stirling and Sons, at Cordale and Dalquhurn, John-Orr Ewing at the Alexandria Works and Archibald Orr-Ewing at Levenbank. Much of the production of all three companies went to the export trade, and particularly to the Indian sub-continent.



Improved technology, new artificial dyes that were colour-fast, and mechanization by manufacturers meant that there was much competition for the sale of these multi-coloured products and a limited market. Quality was high and pattern designs were carefully tailored to preserve and increase market-share.

However, in a country where literacy was low, establishing brand-loyalty was problematic and the solution was the addition of pictorial “tickets” to each length of cloth.

How all this came about is not well known. It may have been initiated by Indian manufacturers as an inducement to purchase their cloth but the Vale companies rapidly entered the fray.

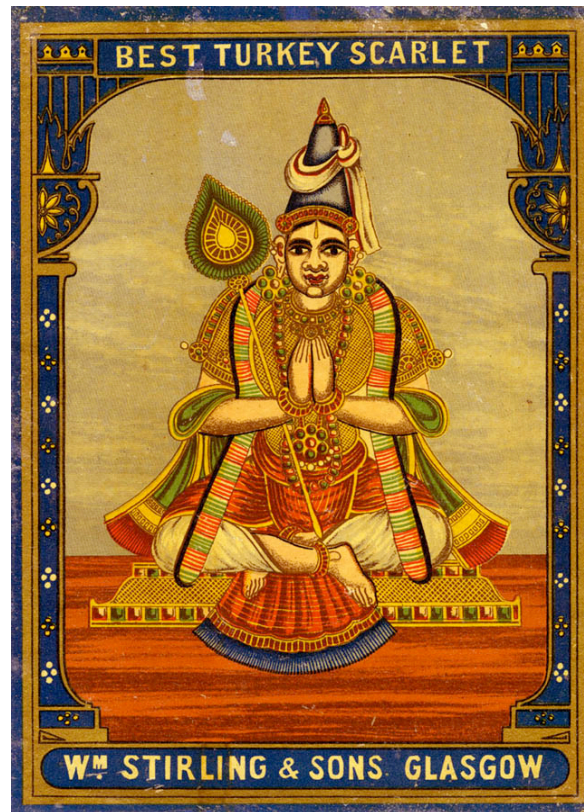


Subjects for the pictures ranged from topical subjects such as Queen Victoria, to nature like the magnificent Macaw from Archibald Orr-Ewing, but the most consistent depictions are subjects from Hindu religious iconography.



In this example from William Stirling, Shiva and Ganesha, the elephant god are featured. Many of the tickets are thought to have regional appeal. In the following picture of a South Indian God, it is not turkey red but turkey scarlet that is that is being marketed. In addition to their artistic merits, each of the labels tells part of a story and one can imagine

the tales told as the family gathered in the evening when a new piece of cloth was purchased during the day.



The next two are also by William Stirling; Sri Kalki, Vishnu's last Avatar, and Krishna killing the demon bird..





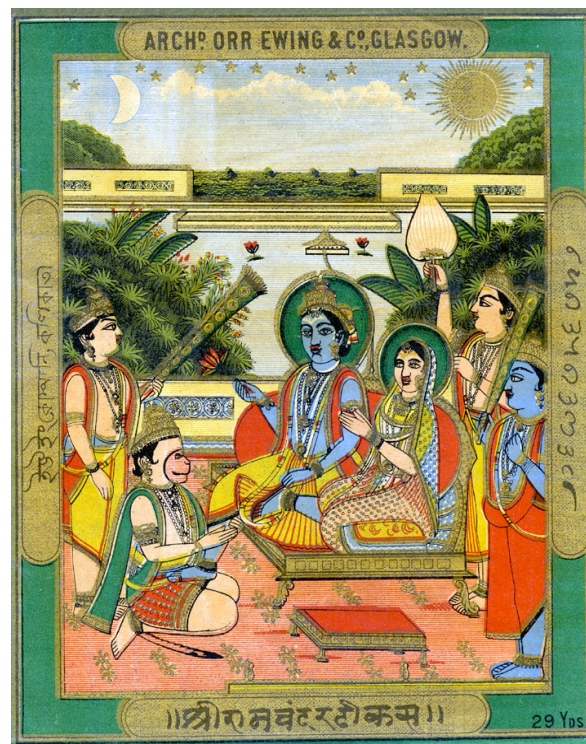
John Orr-Ewing also used the “best turkey red” slogan. The first of these two labels shows Krishna (Govardhannath) balancing the hill to protect it from the monsoon floods.



The second shows Krishna and Gopis.



The last two tickets come from Archibald Orr-Ewing. The first depicts Sri Ramachandra, and the second is interesting as it contains the name of the local agent at the bottom right hand corner.





The paintings for the “tickets” originate from India, as great care is taken to depict the figures in colours dictated by tradition. The paintings were sent to Britain where they were engraved for printing. Frequently some embellishment might be added. For example clouds or other features to fill space in the picture. The labels would then be printed in their vivid colours and sent in a sheet along with the cloth to the importer who would then attach the label to the cloth for marketing and distribution.

The tickets lasted into the early twentieth century but the formation of the United Turkey Red Company in 1898 reduced competition between the British manufactures. After that date, it was more common to find the name of the importer.

More details can be found from “A Trade War in Pictures,” Ilay Cooper in *The India Magazine of her People and Culture*, February 1995.