

Stereotyping & Electrotyping

STEREOTYPING

Some sort of method of replicating printing surfaces was always going to be useful, and from various attempts, two became widely established, *stereotyping* and *electrotyping*, stereotyping for some reason even becoming part of everyday language. While electrotyping was more usually done by specialist firms, stereotyping was commonly done within the printing works.

Stereotyping consisted of two stages. The first made a mould by pressing a layer of papier-mache or *flog* onto the type or forme to be copied, and the second, once the mould had dried, using that mould to cast a copy using molten type-metal. The stereo was usually a pica thick (about 4mm). Apart from being able to make multiple copies (to be able to print small items with several copies to a sheet, to print on several machines at once, or to distribute copies of advertisements to several publications at once), the flog, and

thus the copy, could be curved, to allow for printing on a rotary press. Without this process, rotary presses would have been much more limited in use, for locking type round a cylinder needed cumbersome and very limiting contrivances, which were never popular. The process was relatively simple, the metal was recycled easily, and the flog cheap.

In the latter half of the twentieth century rubber and plastic mouldings were also produced.

ELECTROTYPING

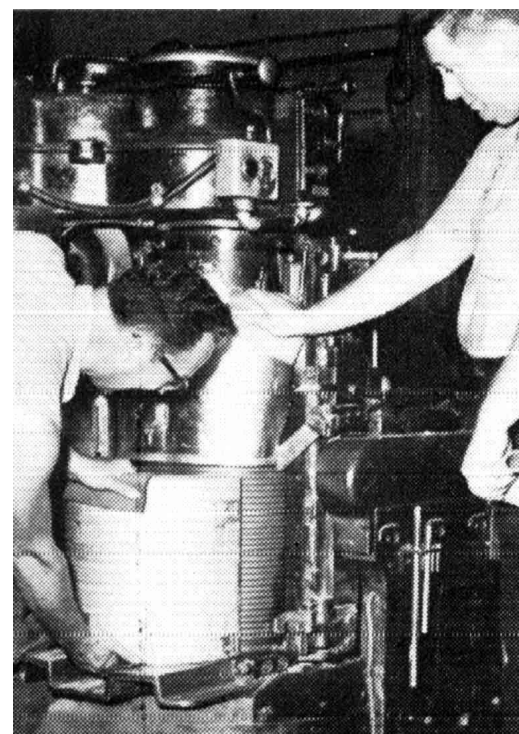
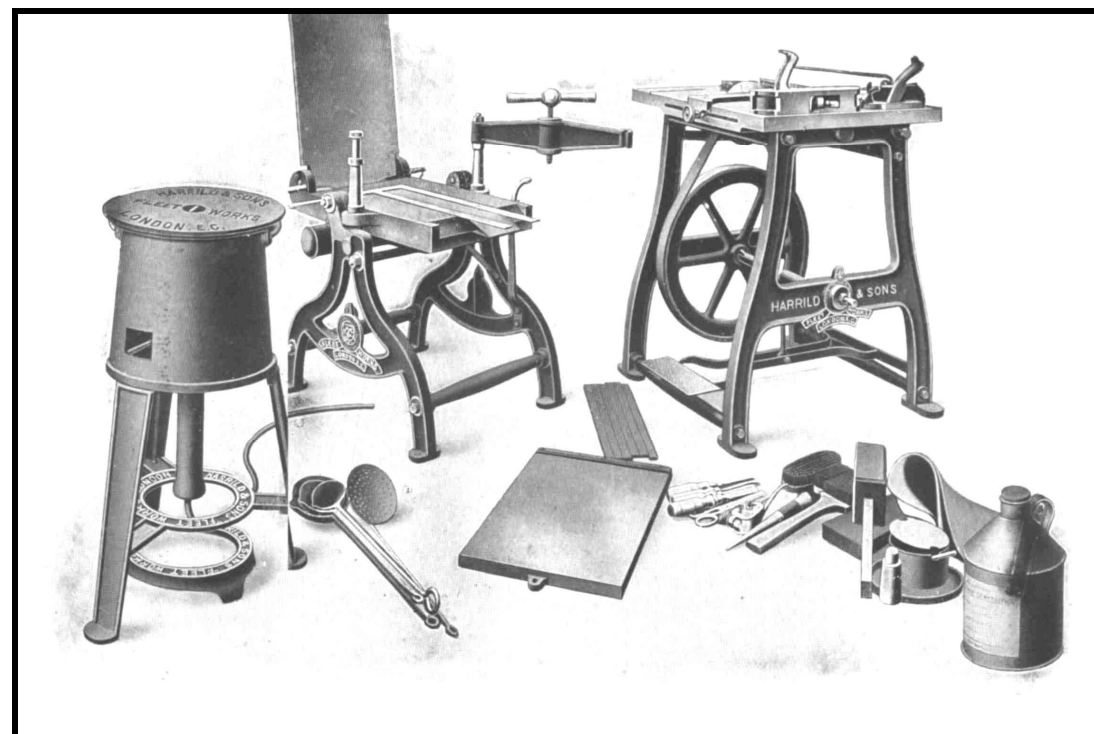
Electrotyping reproduces the surface similarly in two stages, producing first a mould, and then the copy from it, but uses wax for the mould, requiring little or no pressure.

It therefore has the advantage of having little effect on the original (stereotyping's pressure to produce the mould could cause noticeable wear).

The copy was produced by depositing a layer copper by electro-deposition on the wax mould. The wax was of course non-conductive to electricity, so was coated with graphite to provide conductivity. After the copper layer formed, it was peeled off, and backed with molten lead to make it rigid. (Again, like stereotypes, the finished plate could be curved.) To improve durability, the copper could be plated with chromium or other metals.

Electrotypes were more expensive to produce than stereotypes, but retained finer detail, and were much more hard-wearing, especially if plated. They were used to reproduce small stock illustrations and fancy initials sold by typefounders, as well as to make large rotary plates for very long run (large quantity) work such as magazines.

Being only thin, stereotypes and electrotypes had to be mounted on wood or metal backings to make them type-high (if used mixed with type).



Stereotyping equipment, far left, with a pot to melt metal, a tilting case to hold the flog & cast the stereo, and a table to plane the back of the stereo flat. A curved stereo for newspaper printing on a rotary press is shown coming out the caster, centre. Above is a copper electrotype on the left, and the original wood-engraving from which it was made, on the right. This one (of a castor) is for an industrial catalogue, a major use of such items.