

SEVEN CENTURIES OF THE SECRETS OF PAPER

AN EXHIBITION OF THE HISTORY OF PAPER AND WATERMARKS



On the seven hundredth anniversary of the beginning of paper use in Hungary, The Hungarian Paper and Watermark History Association (MAPAVIT) organised a jubilee exhibition entitled *Seven Centuries of the Secrets of Paper* between 9 April and 17 July 2010 in the National Széchényi Library. This retrospective and interactive exhibition was opened by László Sólyom, President of the Republic. The compilers of the exhibition material wanted to commemorate the rich intellectual and material heritage of the 200 Hungarian paper mills and 100 Hungarian paper factories by presenting the most interesting chapters in the history of paper. The centuries of Hungarian paper use abound with special, unique, and valuable artefacts, which weave through every area of life. This comprehensive selection provided an opportunity to view rarely seen and jealously guarded paper secrets discovered during the last 200 years of paper and watermark history research. The world of watermarks, which personalise and identify paper, was represented with about five hundred reconstructed watermark drawings, original watermarked paper illuminated from behind, and a historic watermark cylinder mould and dandy roll.

The exhibition consisted of eight main parts: the *historical exhibition* in the Corvina rooms on the sixth floor; *display workshops* (paper shop, antique shop, printer's, engraver's, paper dipping and restoration bookbinding workshops); the *computer presentation*; the *Digital Hungarian Watermark Database*; the *portrait gallery*; the *exhibition of the work of fine artists* in the library's entrance hall; and the *exhibition of children's drawings* on the main entrance level.

Part of the exhibition



In one part of the first room of the historical exhibition there was a presentation of the definition of paper and watermarks, the preparation of watermarks, types of watermarks, the chronology of the use and preparation of paper, the route by which paper entered Europe and Hungary, paper mill construction, structure and workshops, the stages of paper production, and the history of the first two hundred years of Hungarian paper use. Paper reached Hungary at the beginning of the 14th century, before many other European countries. The first paper charter was issued by Cardinal Gentilis de Monteflorum, papal legate, in Bratislava on 2 May 1310. By the end of the century the use of paper had become widespread in the offices of chapters, convents and counties. For 200 years, paper traders brought these good quality papers from abroad, primarily from Italian, Bavarian, French, Swiss, Austrian and Polish paper mills. The glass cases of the exhibition room also contained interesting extracts from specialist literature relating to the first 200 years of paper preparation and use, alongside various paper and watermark preparation artefacts.

In the second part of the first room visitors could see the tools, materials and work stages of the two branches of paper restoration – document and book restoration. Alongside this, the final displays presented a short history of watermarks and the famous Hungarian paper-based relic included in the Memory of the World List, János Bolyai's brilliant mathematical work, the *Appendix*, along with the watermarks on the paper used.

The central exhibition room accommodated a display of the main events and rare paper and watermark artefacts of the first great period of the five hundred year history of *independent Hungarian paper production* – the age of the paper mills. At the beginning of the 16th century, it was not only bales of paper that arrived in the town of Locse in Upper Hungary from German Silesia but also a paper manufacturer named Master Thomas; under whose leadership the first Hungarian paper mill began to operate in the town. Showcases, tableaux, and maps guided visitors through the history of 16th century Hungarian paper mills to the end of the paper mill era. Each glass display case contained relics related to particular periods of the history of paper. They included the first map of Transylvania, the first runic book, pictures of Hungarian towns, the first Hungarian travel guides, illustrated books on the history of Hungary, Mihály Apafi I's translation of theological writ-

ings, a fine portrayal on paper of *Patrona Hungariae*, one of the most beautiful Baroque tower verses, the first work on heraldry in Hungary, the first Hungarian newspaper (*Mercurius Veridicus*), the first Hungarian scientific journal, the first Hungarian botany book, the first medicinal plant book, etc.

Sixteenth century paper production in Hungary started in a particularly tragic period of its history because the country was ridden with wars, and the uncertain geopolitical situation that followed the defeat at Mohács did not favour the development of the Hungarian paper industry either. In a country divided into three parts, it



Diósgyőr dandy roll from the beginning of the 20th century

was in the relatively more peaceful Transylvania that the “white art” was revived in 1546 in the Vidombák paper mill. Thereafter, paper production was launched again in two other Transylvanian paper mills, Kolozsvár (1564), and Talmács (1574), and then in two in Upper Hungary, Körmöcbánya-1 (1576) and Liptószentmihály (1577). In the showcase that evoked the 16th century paper mills, one of the rarest artefacts from the era was on display: the only surviving copy of the *writing paper ream mark* of Gáspár Heltai’s Kolozsvár paper mill, which has been

preserved among the Todoreszku material in the NSZL Manuscript Collection.

In the 17th century, 26 new paper mills were established. The 18th century was the golden age of Hungarian paper mill foundation, with 100 Hungarian paper mills being put into operation. In the second exhibition room, showcases, tableaux, and illuminated boards displayed the history, watermarks and surviving artefacts of the most well-known of these mills. Visitors were able to admire, among other things, a scale model of the Diósgyőr paper mill along with its Hungarian and German language ream marks, a historical watermark sieve that still works, and a valuable Rejto paper checking and tearing machine. Also to be seen was a classic wire watermark dip mould, large-sized original dipped paper with paper-manufacturer Mária Gyürky’s wreath monogram watermark, an ornate ream mark printed on Murány paper mill watermarked paper, a “sorrowful letter”, a sample copy of a banknote, an exchange board, an advertisement against paper forgery and a three dimensional children’s game made of paper. For blind and visually impaired visitors *embossed watermark figures* were set up on columns to enable disabled people to have a sense of the great variety of motifs used in Hungarian watermarks.

Two members of the Digital Literary Academy (DIA), poets István Csukás and Ferenc Juhász, sent a message to the people of the 21st century. In honour of the 700 year jubilee, they wrote poems by hand on dipped, watermarked paper, saying what paper means to them. Gyozo Libisch did the same in a verse in runic script. Also on display were *a series of watercolours depicting Hungarian paper mills* by István Pankaszi and Erzsébet Mózer, a symbolic wall of sheets of paper set up in memory of Hungarian paper makers, the first Hungarian shaded portrait watermark (depicting Franz Joseph I), watermarked writing paper from 19th century institutions with unique drawings, art nouveau paper trade placards, and well-known pressed name-watermarks (János Arany, Károly Szentiványi).

By the middle of the 19th century, the conversion of the bigger paper mills into factories had already begun. The techniques operating at different levels of performance and quality coexisted for a while, and then at the beginning of the 20th century, industrially produced papers, which were cheaper and of better quality, gradually marginalised the dipped papers of the paper mills. The third exhibition room contained displays about the era of paper factories, the Hungarian paper trade at the beginning of the 20th century, specialist journals, trademark watermarks, stamp watermarks, environmental protection issues connected with paper, plants used to make paper, the activities of the Paper Industry Research Institute, and paper industry education. Large illuminated boards displayed the biggest Hungarian art nouveau pressed watermark, the Hermanec paper factory water-



Rigler advertising placard, 1914

mark, the ornate writing paper watermark by Béla Szénágy and Viktor Hornyánszky, the first Hungarian shaded writing paper watermark, the financial securities paper shaded watermark from the Diósgyőr paper factory (depicting a tiger, the Parliament Building, the Fisherman's Bastion, and King Matthias), and a sheet of historical stamp watermarked paper from the same factory. The National Museum loaned a special salt print photograph prepared on vellum paper. The Museum of Fine Arts provided a freeman's charter, art nouveau envelopes, a gilded gift box and rare pressed watermarks. Three historical dandy rolls were provided by the Diósgyőr Paper Factory for the duration of the exhibition.

The Stamp Museum provided the exhibition with a selection of the most interesting Hungarian stamp watermarks, and Hungarian books of stamps with the latest laser-produced watermarks. A separate showcase displayed information from the Ministry of Environment and Water about environmental issues connected to paper, the potential of recycled paper, the European paper projects, and information and green centres. Visitors were able to view video films on the screen in the



ZBORO paper mill symbol watermark, 1771

room about modern environmental procedures, the latest office printing technology, and the operation of an antique sheet mould paper machine model belonging to the Paper Industry Research Institute.

Stepping out of the historical exhibition into the Ars Librorum area, on the right-hand side visitors were able to see a portrait gallery with depictions of well-known personalities from the history of paper and the Vinczemill paper-dipping workshop. On the left in the Epson printer workshop it was possible to try out the latest home and office printers with their brilliant array of colours. Next to this in the interactive paper area for educational activities visitors could put together and draw watermarks, paint, make dry stamp prints, read environmental protection publications and children's stories, colour in pictures and play paper bingo. In the NSZL restoration and bookbinding workshop interesting tools and materials from these crafts were on display. Orientation when moving between the display workshops was assisted by a computer presentation where films about the work of the exhibitors were continuously shown to inform visitors about the latest technology and products. On the screen of the *Digital Hungarian Watermark Database*, visitors could browse among thirty thousand items of information about 1250 Hungarian watermarks. The final section on this floor was a display of paper items and artist's books.

The exhibition of children's drawings was on the fifth floor. The winning creations and the hundred most beautiful and interesting drawings and paintings sent in during a competition for young artists were on display.

During the four months that the exhibition was open the visitors covered nearly every age-group. The number of visits peaked on the *Night of Museums* when many thousands of adults and children were drawn into the exhibitions by this great opportunity. Experts from MAPAVIT and the NSZL gave several guided tours and organised educational activities. The general opinion of visitors is reflected by an entry written in the visitor's

book on behalf of the Hungarian Association for the History of the Handicrafts Industry: "Congratulations to the curators on this exhibition for connoisseurs! Just a shame there is no similar large-scale permanent paper and watermark history exhibition in either the capital or around the country."

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