

Some observations on Staffordshire type Enamel Wine Labels

Introduction

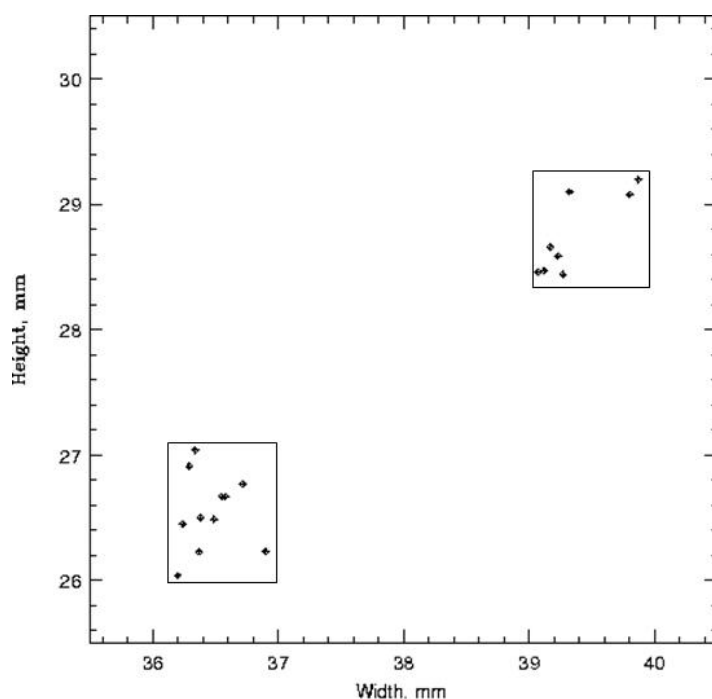
Staffordshire (Staffs) type Enamel Wine Labels are well represented among wine antiques. This type of label, in three different sizes, is shown in picture 1, and is normally thought to be of English origin. In this paper I will explore the belief that some of these Staffs type labels are of French origin and attempt to characterise them in various ways.



Picture 1, Staffs labels in three sizes

These labels come in three sizes, the middle size being the most common. I have only seen one example of the large type, the small ones also being fairly common. I became interested in the possible characterisation of these types of labels after acquiring some in groups of three to six, and noticing a similarity of decoration and size.

The most easily categorised labels appear to be the small ones, which seem to fit nicely into two sizes as can be seen in **graph 1**, below. Family one right, two left, fifteen not shown, (see below). The graph shows height and width in millimetres. Each dot represents a label, and the box has been added for emphasis. It can clearly be seen that the variation in width for each displayed family (approximately ± 0.5 mm) is much smaller than the difference in the mean width of 2.763 mm, and mean height of 1.982 mm as shown in table 1, page 13



Some similarities of decorative styles can also be seen in these three “families” shown below, though not as much as can be seen with the regular size Staffs labels, but more to that point later. There is however, a complicating factor in that there are some labels which are similar to family one in style, but to family two in size. A careful examination of the size shows that for height, three of the four members of family fifteen are smaller than the smallest member of family two, the fourth just being within the range. This leads to the conclusion that family fifteen is a true family, and not part of family two.



Picture 2, small Staffs family one



Picture 3, small staffs family two

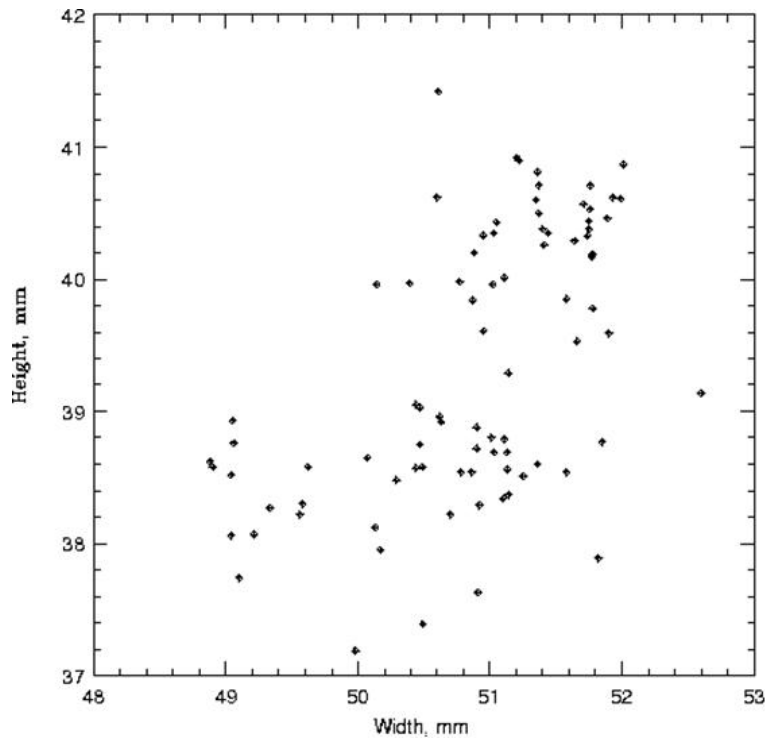


Picture 4, small staffs family fifteen

When you examine the regular sized labels no such simple division can be established, with the heterogeneity of styles and sizes clearly seen in **picture 5** and **graph 2**



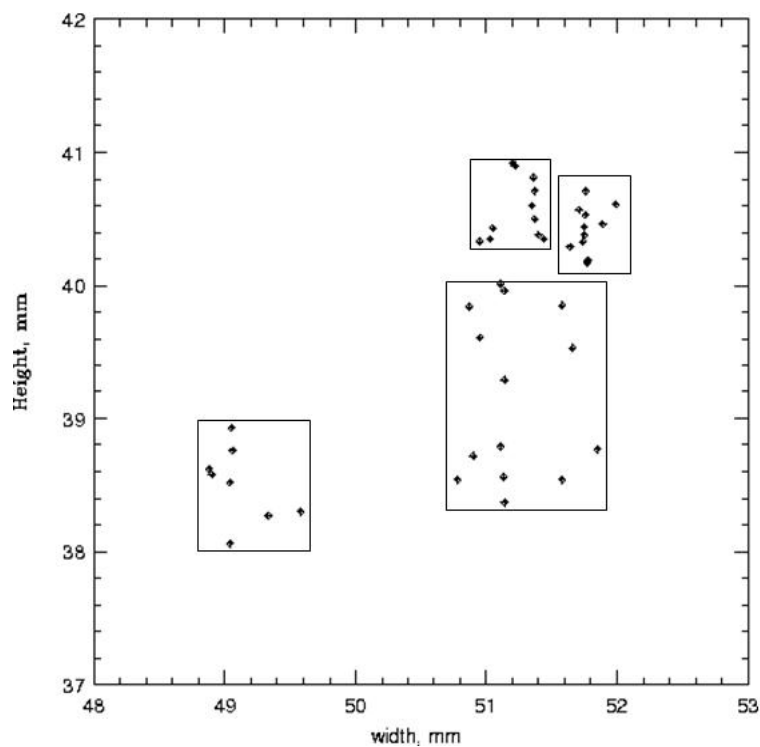
Picture 5, “regular”staffs . Top left to bottom right. Examples of family 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 5 “orphans labels”



Graph 2 showing the variety of sizes for regular Staffs labels

Homogeneity of decorative styles and sizes within families

When you examine these labels more carefully, it is apparent that some labels have similar decorations, “families”. When you examine the size of the labels in these decoratively similar families you observe, as can be seen with the small Staffs labels, that they are similar in size. This suggests that the copper template on which the labels are built were of the same size and origin. Some families for regular Staff labels can be seen in **graph 3**



Graph 3 showing information appearing in graph 2 limited to families three, four, six and eight

The similarity in decoration and sizes can most clearly be seen in families three (upper left), four (upper right), six (lower left) and eight (lower right). The compared features (see below) are the decoration in the label crown, the flower spray at the bottom, and an arrow like decoration which can be seen around the edge.



Picture 6, family three



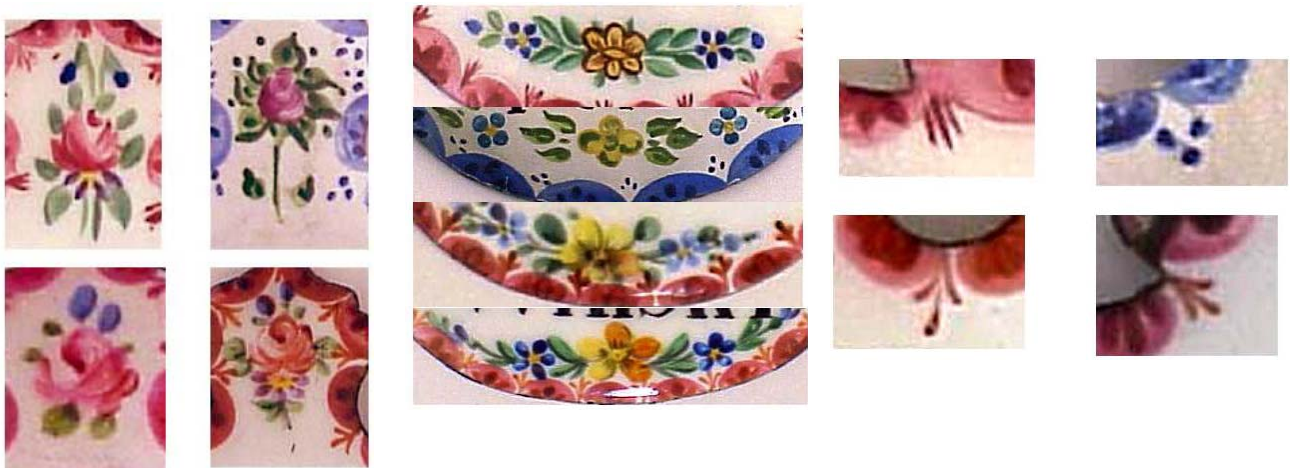
Picture 7, family four



Picture 8, family six



Picture 9, family eight



Picture 10, comparison of the three features, crown, flower spray and edge decoration for families three, four, six and eight respectively



Picture 11, family three, crown decoration and floral spray decoration



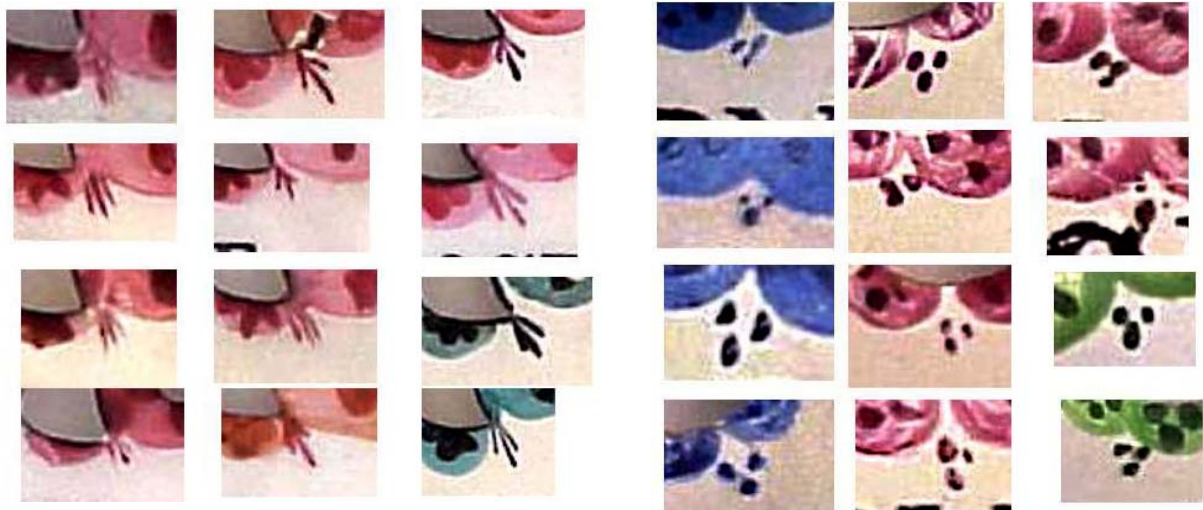
Picture 12, family four, crown decoration and floral spray decoration



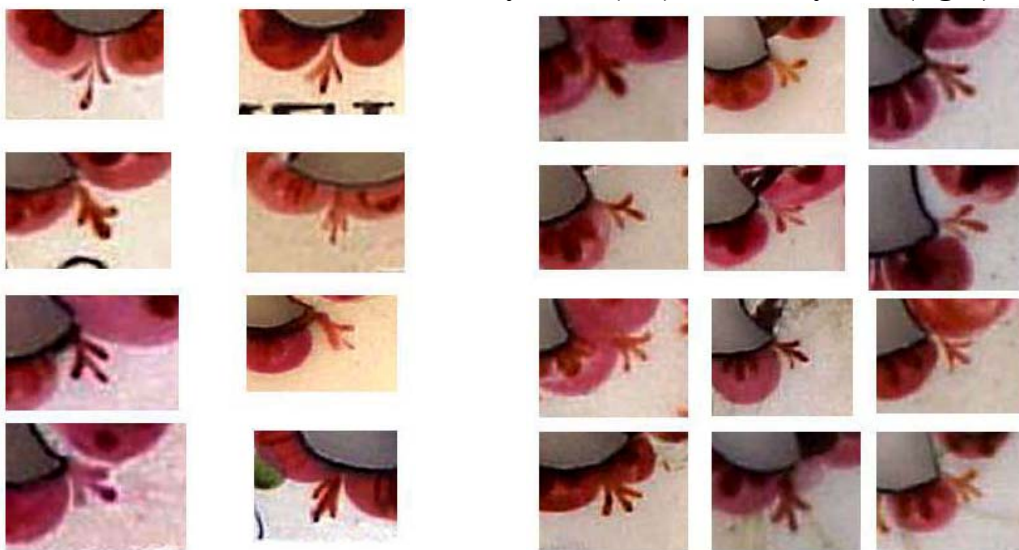
Picture 13, family six, crown decoration and floral spray decoration



Picture 14, family eight, crown decoration and floral spray decoration



Picture 15, side decoration family three (left) and family four (right)



Picture 16, side decoration family six (left) and family nine (right)

Comparison of small and regular sized Staffs families

The similarity in style between each small family and one or more of the regular sized family is very striking. This is most clearly seen when comparing families one and three, in which only one style of decoration is found for both families.



Picture 17, small family one above, regular family three below

Another common feature between families one and three is that many of the names in families one and three are stencil derived, and not hand drawn as is the case with the other families

Comparing small family two to those of regular sizes is not as clear cut. Four of the labels (Alcohol, Alcohol, Ammonia and Peroxide) are similar to those in family four, two (Brandy and Vermouth) to family eight, and the Elder Flower to the Port label shown in family six.
Picture 18, below



Left, family 2 above, 4 below. Center, 2 above, 6 below Right, 2 above, 8 below

Country of origin

I would now like to address the country of origin, or rather origins, of these labels. Reference books (Whitworth and others) describe this shape of label as being English in origin, but I disagree to a point, as I believe that some of these were of French origin.

Families two and four

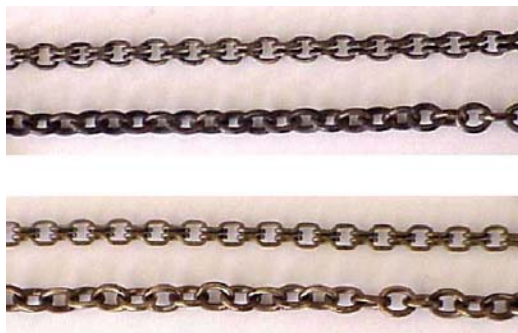
These I believe to truly be of English origin, mid to late 19th century, for the reasons above, but also because some of them are marked “England” on the back. In addition one of the small labels is named “Vermouth Francais”. I do not believe that any Frenchman would misspell his own language, which of course should be Français. I also believe family eight to be of English origin based on chain evidence (see below).

Families one, three and fifteen are more contentious.

The main evidence that these are French, early 20th century, comes from the V&A museum, London, who kindly allowed me to measure blanks originating from the Samson factory in Paris. One of the blank labels at the V&A is identified as Samson and is identical in shape and size to family one.

Other evidence: Chains

There is little doubt that evidence based on chains is tenuous at best, however there is a remarkable consistency of chain types in each family, and between families one and three, and families two and four. These are shown in **pictures 19, 20, 21 and 22, below.**



Family 1, above and 3 below (each two types)



Family 2, above and 4 below (each two types)



Family six

Family eight

The larger chain type shown for families two, four, six and eight, and also found for all other regular sized Staffs labels with the exception of family three, is almost universally found on Hallmarked silver wine labels in the 1770 through 1850 period, and can be identified as English with high confidence. The smaller chain shown for families two and four is a smaller version of the larger chain type for these families.

The unique chains shown for families one, three and fifteen (upper chain type), I believe to be French in origin. These are similar to chains seen on labels that are marked France.

Other evidence; Fluorescence

In looking at these labels with a standard fluorescence lamp of the kind used for stamps, the homogeneity, with the exception of family two is striking. None of families one, three and four, and all of families six and eight, fluoresces. In family two, Alcohol, Alcohol, Ammonia and Peroxide do not fluoresce, in good agreement with their being linked to family four. The Brandy and Vermouth labels in family two do fluoresce in agreement with their being linked to family nine, and the Elder Flower label fluoresces in agreement with it being linked to family six.

Other evidence, miswritten “A” and “N” (some)

A fascinating finding is that a number of labels have some of their letters miswritten, specifically the “A” and “N”. Even more gratifying is that these labels are completely in agreement with the assumptions above. The correct and miswritten forms of the letters are shown below.



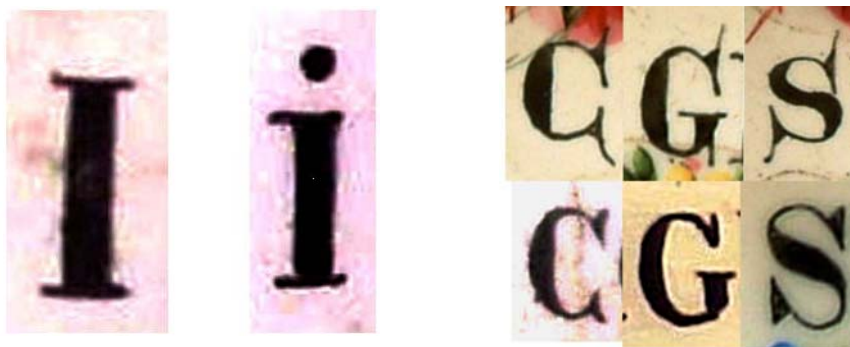
Picture 23, above correct, below miswritten



Picture 24, labels with miswritten “A” and “N” Compare these to the numerous examples in family eight.

Three of these labels are from small family two (above), and four from the regular sized family four (below), cementing the theory suggested earlier in this article about their familial relationship. It is interesting to note that while all the “A” are miswritten, only the “N” in the Brandy and Sauterne labels are miswritten, the others being correct. Is this the same decorator being inconsistent or closely related persons with slightly differing decorating styles? Or even, dare one say, a deliberate mistake as a form of identity?

Other evidence “I” compared to “i”,_Exaggerated C, G and S



Picture 25, left upper case, right lower case Picture 26, above exaggerated, lower not

It is interesting to note that families are consistent in the use of either “I” or “i”, but not both, suggesting a local style. Families one, two, three, four and seven all have the upper case I, while families six, eight, (with the exception of two of the whisky labels) twelve and thirteen use the lower case “i”. Another common thread of those families with the “i” is that the scalloped colour around the edge is always red, not the case with the families having the upper case “I”. As the only labels that do not fit neatly into this scheme are two out of three of the whisky labels in family eight, I am proposing a decoration variant.

Exaggerated C, G and S

Another trait is the way certain letters are written, this being particularly evident for the C, G and S, and is consistent across a family. The more exaggerated style can be seen in families 6, 8, 9, 11, 12 and 13, see below

Table 1, Comparative family information

Family	Number of labels	Type of label	Chain	Fluorescence	Exaggerated letters	Scalloped Border only red in colour	I i	Miswritten A, N	Mean Width (mm)	Height range (mm)	Width range (mm)	Mean Height (mm)	Picture number
1	18	Small	French	No	No	No	I	No	36.381	35.67-36.90 26.04-27.04		26.629	2
2	14	Small	English	Some	No	No	I	Some	39.144	38.71-39.87 28.34-29.20		28.611	3
15	4	Small	French	No	No	No	I	No	39.247	38.59-39.67 27.93-28.62		28.23	4
3	25	Regular	French	No	No	No	I	No	51.229	50.07-51.93 38.65-40.92		40.051	6
4	14	Regular	English	No	No	No	I	Some	51.797	51.64-52.01 40.29-40.87		40.487	7
5	2	Regular	English	Yes	No	Yes	---	No	51.375	51.25-51.58 38.51-38.54		38.525	5
6	13	Regular	English	Yes	Yes	Yes	i	No	48.983	48.13-49.58 38.06-39.33		38.621	8
7	3	Regular	English	No	No	Yes	I	No	51.437	50.88-51.96 38.85-39.87		39.45	5
8	26	Regular	English	Yes	Yes	Yes	I i	No	51.116	50.13-52.06 37.63-39.99		38.917	9
9	2	Regular	English	Yes	Yes	No	---	No	50.66	50.49-50.83 38.58-38.75		38.665	5
10	5	Regular	English	No	No	Yes	i	No	50.812	50.06-51.02 39.96-40.72		40.366	5
11	2	Regular	English	Yes	Yes	Yes	---	No	50.82	50.63-51.01 38.80-38.92		38.86	5
12	12	Regular	English	Yes	Yes	Yes	i	No	50.62	50.17-51.33 37.39-39.00		38.381	5
13	3	Regular	English	Yes	Yes	Yes	i	No	49.823	40.56-50.29 38.22-38.58		38.427	5

References

E.W. Whitworth. Wine Labels. Published, Jarold & Sons Ltd. Norwich 1966

Conclusions

In conclusion, I believe that the information above shows the following;

- 1) These kinds of labels readily fall into families, based upon size, decoration style, type of chain, fluorescence, and miswriting of certain letters. English families two (Alcohol, Alcohol, Ammonia and Peroxide) and four appear to be crafted in the same workshop(s). French families one, three and fifteen also appear to be crafted in one workshop, but not the same one as for the English families.
- 2) Families one, three and fifteen are of French origin, possibly the Samson workshop. All other families are English in origin.
- 3) The small Staffs labels fall into groups, one English in origin, the others French in origin, as outlined above. The variety of decorative styles for family two, the English small labels, suggest that the English source of small copper bases supplied several workshops. The consistency of decorative styles for families one, three and fifteen suggest that the French source had only one workshop, that workshop also crafting the regular sized Staffs labels. If you accept this then, by extrapolation, the regular Staffs family three is French, and all other regular sized families are English.
- 3) The fact that some groups of English origin labels fluoresce and others do not suggests, at minimum, differing styles of enameling, and this may be representative of geographical differences. It is possible that some light can be shed on this by examining trace elements in the copper base of these labels.

The above outlined theory is clearly my interpretation of the evidence and I would be happy to hear the view of others pro or con. I would also be most interested to hear of other examples of these types of labels with miswritten letters.

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