



# The Perfection of the Paper Clip: Curious Tales of Invention, Accidental Genius, and Stationery Obsession

*James Ward*

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## **The Perfection of the Paper Clip: Curious Tales of Invention, Accidental Genius, and Stationery Obsession** James Ward

From making correction fluid at home to the dark secrets of fluorescent ink, via pencil wars and moments of accidental genius: James Ward leads a tour through the stationery cupboard.

We are surrounded by stationery: half-chewed Cristal Bics and bent paper clips, rubber bands to fiddle with or ping, blunt pencils, rubbers and Tipp-ex. They are integral parts of our everyday environment. So much so that we have no idea of the stories they have to tell.

But James Ward is here to explain how important stationery is to us. After all, who remains unmoved by the sight of the first sheet of a brand new notepad? And which of humanity's brightest ideas didn't start life on a scrap of paper, a Post-it, or in the margins of a notebook? Exploring these everyday objects, Ward reveals tales of invention - accidental and brilliant - and bitter rivalry. He also asks the difficult questions, who is Mr Pritt? What does shatter-proof resistant mean? How many pens does Argos use? And what do design evolutions in desk organisers mean for society? Perhaps most importantly, it's time to ask Blu-Tack: what are the 1000s of uses they claim?

Combining telling details, peculiar facts, a love of humour, hubris and brimming with curious stories, this book will change the way you look at your desk forever.

## **The Perfection of the Paper Clip: Curious Tales of Invention, Accidental Genius, and Stationery Obsession Details**

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## From Reader Review The Perfection of the Paper Clip: Curious Tales of Invention, Accidental Genius, and Stationery Obsession for online ebook

### Yune says

Yes, I am the girl who went to the stationery store after school and wandered around, just looking at all the cool stuff in there. I've given superior erasers (I'm quite serious) as gifts to friends. I've also been frustrated by the disparity between standard paper sizes in the U.S. and Korea (8.5" x 11" and A4, respectively), so having a UK author discuss the stupidities of purely American (unobserved elsewhere in the world) systems was a bracing relief to me.

You learn a bit about the inventors of each object and how the world survived without each, with sly humor to entertain along the way. Don't use this as a research source, but as a breezy tour of office supplies, and you'll be fine.

This is not a deep read or one that will astonish you, but for a certain niche audience, it's perfect.

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### Leslie says

Screw this insufferable book.

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### David V. says

Received as an ARC from the publisher. Started 3-11-15. Finished 3-16-15. Mr. Ward, who has a blog about loving boring things, has taken what you would consider to be a boring subject and turned it into a fascinating and funny one. This book is wonderful. Our house has lots of office and art supplies, so it was especially interesting to read about an iconic product and be able to say that you had(or have) one of those items. The stories behind the invention, development, rivalries and brand names were compelling reads. So that's how our numerous Sharp tv's got their names! This book details the intriguing stories behind everyday objects. Among other thing you'll learn about the connection between the musical group The Monkees and Wite-Out. It's a trivia hound's heaven and will be kept as a reference book in my library.

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### Emma Sea says

I now have an inappropriate crush on James Ward. There are very few humans in the world who would find nine pages on the history of the stapler engrossing reading, and I bet they're all on GR. The man who *wrote it*? I want to mark him with a Trodat date stamp and lick his brain (I know, I said it was inappropriate, I'm so sorry). And to then expand that to encompass ink, correction fluid, the highlighter, paper, ball point pens, rulers, pencils, filing systems, erasers, glue and tape and Blu-tack, and . . . ooh, I'm shivering just at the recollection.

## **Kathleen Dixon says**

I found this book at times a little too thorough and ended up skimming quite a few passages, but then I'd find something very interesting and read it word for word. All in all, this is a fascinating look at the history of design and manufacture (and the people behind it all) of common stationery items.

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## **Miguel Oxamendi says**

Entertaining read. I don't think you have to be an office supply geek like myself to enjoy this book. It gave me a new appreciation with how historically recent are most of the office supplies we use every day. The book could have used fewer histories of the acquisitions and mergers for some of the companies.

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## **Heather says**

*The pen is not dead. Long live the pen.*

The blurb says it all in one succinct line: James Ward leads a tour through the stationery cupboard. Starting with his own desk tidy, he takes the reader through pens, pencils, sharpeners, tip-ex, post-it notes and all the history that went into their creation. I get it, it sounds a snooze. But it's not.

For one, if you're a stationery aficionado (which you should be, because stationery rules) it's generally interesting to see where they came from. Has anyone in their life wondered where Blu-tack came from, let alone what are the 1000s of uses the company claim for it? Ward has, evidently, but the moment he starts telling it, you're kind of interested.

More than just fact sheets, it's historical anecdotes, branding and marketing mishaps, generally funny stories and a nice tone to the whole thing. Argos' customer service Twitter putting his mind at rest at the end of one chapter regarding pens shows the wit that's there throughout.

From Morrissey describing the sexual pleasure of visiting a stationery store to the amount of pencils Ikea uses and - of course - that infamous 'not cool to do drugs' pencil mishap, it's just a really nice book for anyone who likes a good snoop around Paperchase.

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## **Leslie Ann says**

I really wanted to like this book, but the stories are strung together weakly and rarely provide interesting information. For example, how exactly did the paper clip assume its shape? Ward doesn't tell us, but is happy to provide patent details. I also wish Ward included more photos to illustrate his product descriptions. I thought that I could handle just a chapter before going to sleep, but when I find myself skimming even the mercifully short chapters, I know it is time to let go.

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## Caroline says

I loved this - but I think you'd have to be a fellow stationery addict to do so. The author details the history of pencils, pens, staplers, post it notes etc. My favourite part is in the chapter on highlighters; the author is reading the Stabilo company's history and '. . . you can probably imagine the sense of satisfaction - the visceral thrill - I felt as I ran the chisel tip of a yellow STABILO highlighter over the words . . .' Excellent.

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## Nicola says

James Ward ... please write more books. Your first outing was more fascinating than even I, a fellow worshipper at the shrine of stationery, could have imagined. Who'd have thought that hole punches are a direct consequence of the abandonment of pigeonholes for mail? Who'd have posited that Post-it notes had such a long period of stasis before becoming ubiquitous?

There's the odd typo, and Ward doesn't treat data as a plural word - something about which I still get cranky - but I enjoyed every chapter, every page, every fact and factoid. And learn? Wow, did I learn a lot.

So, Mr Ward. Hope you've got another book in the works. You may write a blog titled 'I like boring things', but you and your offerings don't qualify for inclusion there.

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## Bekka says

When I got the email from the publisher asking me if I'd be interested in a review copy of this book, I pounced on it. I mean, I know that I don't typically review non-fiction, but it seemed right up my alley anyway, so I went for it.

The thing about this book is you really need to FUCKING LOVE stationary and useless facts and history and patents. This book is mostly just paragraph after paragraph of who applied for which patent when. The chapters open up with a verrrry quick anecdote about the office supply the author will be tackling - usually just a paragraph or two - and then we launch right into the history. This "dry British humor" is very hard to come by. It's usually a word or two at the end of a point. Some deadpanning or sarcasm here or there, but otherwise much more "dry" than "humorous." And I found the chapter headings misleading. For instance "Everything I know about people, I learnt from pens" is really just a history of the pen. It started off interesting, with the development of the Bic Cristal, but quickly devolved into the history of writing tools. Since there is less of a narrative than just a spewing of facts, this all got very boring, very quickly.

I ended up just skimming most of it after the first four chapters. Reading every single word was putting me to sleep. The little bits of humor were funny but too few and far between to keep my attention. The design, however is beautiful, with gorgeous full-color photographs for endpapers and interesting illustrations for the chapter headings.

I really wish I had loved this more, but it just wasn't as charming or quirky as I expected it to be.

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## Shannon says

Writing in a brand new notebook. Organizing a desk drawer. Shopping for office supplies. If you have a smile on your face 1.) you're not alone, and 2.) you probably need to read *The Perfection of the Paper Clip* by James Ward.

I'm sure there are readers out there who would find a book about stationery dreadfully dull, but I'm not one of them. I can't tell you how much I love binder clips and Sharpies, or how much I despise using White Out from a pen. James Ward has similar feelings and uses *The Perfection of the Paper Clip* to both share his love for stationery and explore the history behind some of our most commonly used products.

Starting with the simplicity of the paper clip—which actually has numerous different designs—Ward works his way through the supplies in his desk, tracing the history behind each item. Pens, pencils, highlighters, staples, thumb tacks, tape and glue are just a few of the products on the journey, which spans decades and crosses continents. Ward adds bits of humor in funny asides and jabs that will delight the nerd in all of us and help to keep the book fun and fresh. *The Perfection of the Paperclip* is a great mix of random facts, bits of history, and a wildly relatable love for stationery.

More at [rivercityreading.com](http://rivercityreading.com)

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## Paul says

Some people see stationary as a necessary evil, as long as the pen works and the end of it has not been chewed too much, then all is good. Then there are those who covet the clean piece of paper, the curl of wood from a freshly sharpened pencil, the cellophane covering the new pack of Post-It's or the possibilities that a pristine cover of a Moleskine holds. If you are in the latter group; this book is for you. Each and every one of us uses stationary in some form or other, though that has fallen with the advent of smart phones and devices.

Ward has an obsession with stationary bordering on the unnatural, but that obsession has driven him to ask the questions that no one else would ask, such as: What are the 1000's of uses for blue tack? How many pencils do Ikea supply each year? Who pays \$43 for a pencil? Is there a risk when licking a gummed envelope? And where has the sellotape gone again?

He tells us just how the highlighter came into being, the evolution of the pen from quill to gel, Why the staples never fit your stapler and why one bank stopped chaining its pens to the desk. Sadly we seem to be losing the art of writing, as tapping things out on your phone seems to have more appeal. I have always liked stationary; as I look around me I have two of the black and yellow waspish coloured Staedtler pencils, one unbranded pen, a Uni-ball pen (my favourite), a plastic eraser and one of those double pencil sharpeners that have a standard and a large hole. In all my years I have never used the large hole to sharpen a pencil...

This is a brilliantly quirky book about those things that we never really consider in any depth. Ward has uncovered the history behind the most mundane of objects and tells the stories of some of the characters who made the brands that we know and love today. Great stuff.

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## Tracey Allen at Carpe Librum says

I love stationery, and I absolutely adored reading *Adventures in Stationery: A Journey Through Your Pencil Case* by James Ward recently.

Ward's love of stationery is infectious, and I frequently lost myself researching his favourite shops, and discovering websites dedicated to various forms of stationery.

Every time I picked up this book, I had to have my tablet handy, just so I could look up images of the items described: the Blackwing 602 pencil, Pink Pearl eraser, different paper clip shapes and more. I enjoyed many trips down memory lane, remembering the kinds of glue I used in primary school (clag, PVA and remember these?) to the different types of white out used in high school (liquid paper bottle, the correction pen and who could forget the thinner!).

*Adventures in Stationery* is funny, entertaining and educational, and I loved reading about the invention of sticky notes, how Scotch tape got its name and even that 3M was originally known as the Minnesota Mining & Manufacturing company. If you've never understood the meaning behind staple sizes then this is the book for you.

Here is just a small selection of my favourite discoveries in *Adventures in Stationery*:

Page 78 - the term foolscap, "*used to describe a sheet of paper 13.5" x 17" ... derives from the 'fool's cap' watermark... introduced in the middle of the fifteenth century.*"

Page 100 - "*a ferrule is the metal sleeve holding the eraser in place.*"

Page 115 - before there were erasers or rubbers, "*the preferred method for removing pencil lines was to use stale bread.*"

Page 213 - "*When Blu-Tack was originally developed, it was white in colour, but the blue colouring was added after concerns were raised that children might think it was chewing gum and attempt to eat it.*"

Finally, Ward's mention of the use of skeuomorphic design by software designers to replicate an object's physical characteristics in another form (for instance, making the icon for the 'cut' function in MS Word look like a pair of scissors) blew my mind.

*Adventures in Stationery: A Journey Through Your Pencil Case* by James Ward was an absolute joy to read and even the book itself is a treasure with an attractive hard back design featuring paper clips, drawing pins and pen lids. Perfect, right?

Highly recommended for stationery lovers everywhere!

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## Alex Myers says

I am fascinated by this topic and couldn't wait to dive in to a quirky history of stationery. I was pretty thoroughly disappointed, however. Ward's writing ranges from similar to an elementary school report (factual, dry, repetitive, unnuanced) and snarky. He has a tendency to end paragraphs with punchlines that are irrelevant. The coverage isn't very deep, nor very clever, and the chapters struggle to connect disparate points.

