

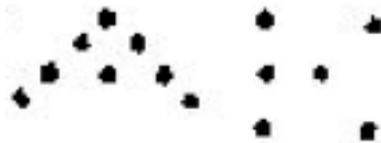
**Alfred Edments - Pioneer Retailer (1853–1909)**

In a recent auction of Bob Szymanski's (see the article on these Auctions in the April 2012 Perfin Bulletin of NZ&A) I found an item that was described and a new pattern previously unlisted.

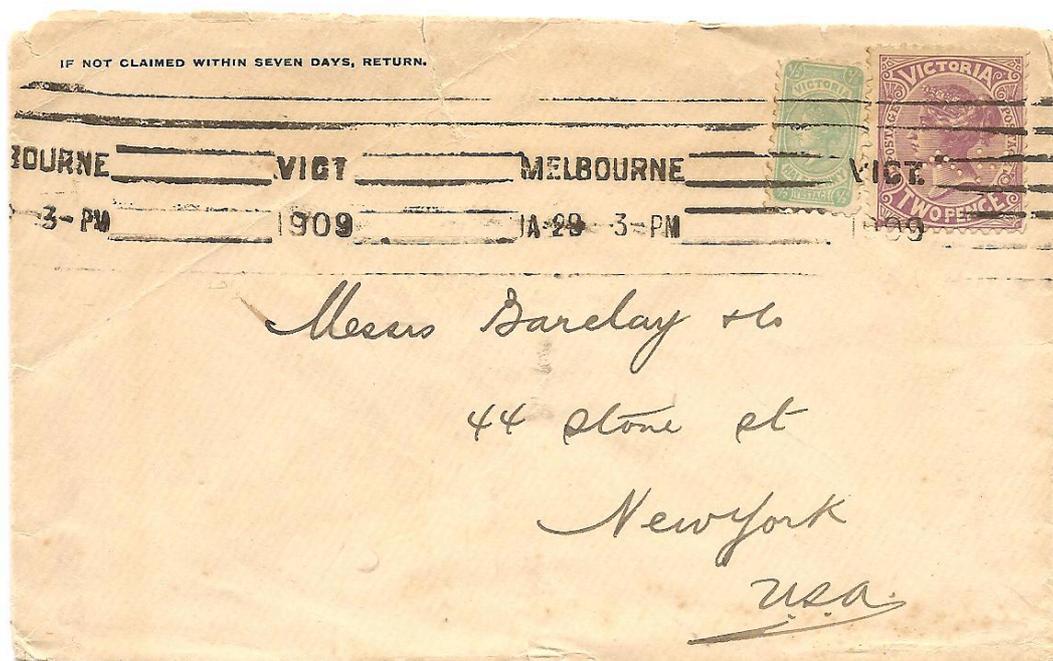
It was shown as a new AE and it was clearly a service puncture. This is not that unusual as there have been hundreds of new service punctures found since HAPP was issued in 2003.

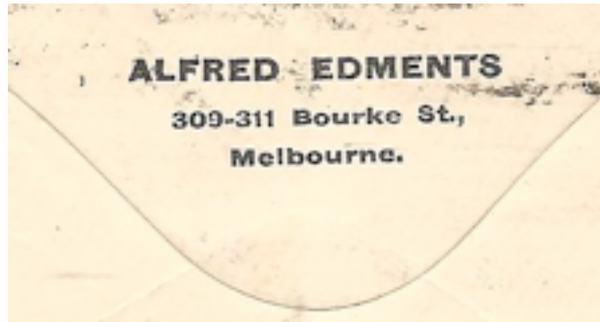
They are largely not reported through the Bulletin and they are not listed in the HAPP updates (October 2005 and February 2012) and neither are images issued.

What was unusual about this new AE was that the stamp was on a proving cover showing the user as Melbourne retailer Alfred Edments.



New 'A E'





The pattern is a service puncture and it is different to any of the AK's that are listed in HAPP, in fact its closest cousin is not an AE at all but rather, AK.1. This is interesting as other patterns listed as AK's share characteristics of patterns that we know of as AE's. Lets look at the two groups in isolation and then collectively.

AE's: There are six of these and they are all service punctures and they have no known user. They are reported in HAPP with the possible user as the Australian Estates Co. Ltd. of 114 William St, Melbourne. No other user is suggested in Appendix 1-Possible User Identities (HAPP p13).

They are mostly found on Victorian stamps although AE.1 and AE.6 are found on both Victorian and Commonwealth issues and AE.2 is only found on Commonwealth issues as it was used in the early 1920's, but its location in Melbourne is supported by postmark evidence.

My examples generally conform to the HAPP dates but I have identified some variation and more types. The chronology of the AE devices is as follows:

AE.4	1 type	1907
AE.3	4 types	1908-09
AE.5	2 types	1909
AE.6	2 types	1912-15
AE.1	2 types	1911-26
AE.2	2 type	s1922

The story becomes more complete when we also consider the AK's.

AK's: There are four of these and again they are all service punctures and they have no known user. HAPP lists Alfred Kerr and Australian Kerosene Oil and Mineral as possible users (see Appendix 1-Possible User Identities (HAPP p13)). But these are both Sydney companies and would most likely only relate to the AK.3 which is only found on issues of NSW.

What is more this AK.3 has a well formed, and complete A and K. HAPP also has a note in the "Notes re A Perfins" at the conclusion of the A section which states, "Re AK.1-2, 4 the letters AK are the central feature in the trademark of the McCracken's City Brewery (see MCB.1-18) and may well have been used by that company."

This is not likely to be the case as McCracken's City Brewery merged with five other breweries in 1907 as Carlton and United Breweries Ltd and this predates the latest report of usage of an AK.1 and AK.4 which is 1910.

Setting AK.3 aside as it is a Sydney device, the remaining AK's, (AK.1, .2 and .4) are only found on Victorian issues and also they have patterns with indistinct (6 pin) K's that look somewhat like E's.

These Victorian AK's have the following chronology:

AK.1	1 type	1910
AK.2	1 type	unknown
AK.4	1 type	1910

Given the new AE has an indistinct E (6 pins) that is similar in structure to the K's (6 pin) of AK.1, .2 and .4 it is possible that these AK's are indeed AE's.

In fact if we join the AE's and the Victorian AK's together and add in the new AE (1909), it actually builds into a logical chronology for a single user. Our knowledge of the history of Alfred Edments (see article in this Bulletin) shows them operating in Victoria from 1888 and from the 309-311 Bourke St address from at least 1901 until around 1936. This encompasses the entire period of the use of the Victorian AE/K group.

Therefore in the absence of other possible users for the Victorian AE/K's, the evidence of the new proving cover, the ambiguous nature of the K in the Victorian AK's, the neat chronology of the AE/K's as a group and the known trading period of the only proven AE user, it is reasonable to conclude that Alfred Edments were most likely the user for the Victorian AE/K group.

This would suggest the following changes and additions to HAPP:

AE.1: Alfred Edments 309-311 Bourke St, Melbourne as probable user

AE.2: Alfred Edments 309-311 Bourke St, Melbourne as probable user

AE.3: Alfred Edments 309-311 Bourke St, Melbourne as probable user

AE.4: Alfred Edments 309-311 Bourke St, Melbourne as probable user

AE.5: Alfred Edments 309-311 Bourke St, Melbourne as probable user

AE.6: Alfred Edments 309-311 Bourke St, Melbourne as probable user

AE.7 New AE pattern, Alfred Edments 309-311 Bourke St, Melbourne as known user

AE.8: Was AK.1 Alfred Edments 309-311 Bourke St, Melbourne as probable user, put note on AK.1 "now AE.8"

AE.9: Was AK.2 Alfred Edments 309-311 Bourke St, Melbourne as probable user, put note on AK.2 "now AE.9"

AE.10: Was AK.4 Alfred Edments 309-311 Bourke St, Melbourne as probable user, put note on AK.4 "now AE.10"

If you have any other AE's or AK's in your collections and they show evidence that contradicts, supports or improves what I have above then please share them with me and I will update this article in a future Bulletin and acknowledge all input.

\* Alfred Edments was born on 17 October 1853 at Whitechapel, London, son of James Edments, labourer, and his wife Ann, née Lyons. After a brief schooling and employment with a cork merchant he sailed for Sydney in 1865 aged just 12 years old. He joined his brother James, a contractor at Cowra, but Alfred soon returned to Sydney and there he found employment with a wholesale drapery firm. In around 1869 he moved to Wellington, New Zealand, to manage a dairy-produce store. His time in Wellington was successful but in 1880 he returned to Sydney and became an auctioneer and commission agent in the firm of James Walker.

In 1888 Alfred moved again, this time to Melbourne where he established himself as an auctioneer and then founded the Melbourne Supply Stores at 82 Bourke St, which was noted for its watches, clocks, jewellery, cutlery and fancy goods. Alfred's expanded his stores to include several Melbourne suburbs and Geelong and later opened two shops in Hobart.

In 1891 Alfred made the first of three overseas buying trips and established a buying office in London. He travelled through Europe and the US in search of novelties and later he employed a network of English and Continental buyers. His fancy goods business was the largest in Victoria and became one of the largest of its kind in the

Commonwealth. On 15 September 1896 he married Annie Fennell and they made their home at Goodwood, Canterbury Rd, Surrey Hills.

Alfred established his main Melbourne store at 309-311 Bourke Street in a three-storied spacious building about 1901. He believed in the principle of cash payment and in addition to his retail stores he conducted a cash mail order business as well as wholesale trading through special showrooms on the upper floors of his Bourke St location.

Alfred was a generous employer and he distributed a proportion of profits half-yearly in the form of staff premiums, as well as giving holiday pay and in some cases wages as well as medical bills, were paid to staff that were ill. He made a substantial donation to the (Royal) Melbourne Hospital and his employees were obliged to contribute one penny each per week towards its support.

Continual hard work caused Alfred's health to deteriorate while he was still in his forties and, in the last nine months of his life, he managed his business from his home. On 13 July 1909, he died of heart disease, leaving an estate valued for probate at £107,594 and an enlightened will, which enabled his trustees to expand and continue his business.

Alfred's will appointed his wife Annie and Mr. F. G. Read executors and provided that his estate be allowed to accumulate for 20 years, or until the death of his wife. Thereafter, one-quarter of his estate was to be held in perpetuity for the benefit of charity. Under this management the company continued to expand establishing a store in Adelaide in 1916 and eventually leading to a network of 23 stores mainly in Melbourne.

When Mrs. Annie Edments died, in 1928, the estate was valued at about £1,000,000, and the annual income was £100,000, of which £25,000 went to charity. Later on the death of Mr. Read the estate came under the control of the Trustees Executors and Agency Co., Ltd., which formed the business into a proprietary company.

The proprietary company traded until 1936 when the Trustees entered into negotiations with Woolworths Ltd which had been trading in Australia for 12 years and was mainly located in Sydney (20 stores) with stores in Queensland (8) and WA (2) as well as New Zealand.

Woolworths eventually purchased a selection of sites and these were progressively rebranded as Woolworths. The sale did not include the free hold on the various Edments stores and these continued to be held by the trustees and sold in subsequent years.

In July 1936 a new company Edments Ltd. Was formed and this company occupied four key Edments locations in Melbourne (Bourke St.), Geelong, Hobart, Adelaide and later expanded into Sydney, Launceston, Perth (1938) and Brisbane (1946). The company was later acquired by Angus & Coote but continued to trade as Edments in SA and WA until as recently as 2008.

\* <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/edments-alfred-6089>