

## AN INTRODUCTION TO PERFINS

*By Peter Sempfendorfer, Life Member of*

*The Wagga Stamp Club Inc.*

**DEFINITION:** Wikipedia states “in philately, a perfin is a stamp that has had initials or a name perforated across it to discourage theft. The name is a contraction of **perforated initials** or **perforated insignia**. They are also sometimes called **SPIFS Stamps Perforated with Initials of Firms and Societies**.”

The website [perfins.com.au](http://perfins.com.au) says “The term perfin (**Perforated initials**) was coined by a New York collector in 1943 a Mr. H. Card. In the UK about the same era **SPIFS (Stamps Perforated by Initials of Firms and Societies)** was used. The accepted definition of a perfin in Australia is a stamp which has initials or any figure or design perforated into it by a business, society or other organization.”

The STAMP Collector’s Encyclopedia by R.J. Sutton has the entry “**Perfins**. Punch-perforated or “branded” stamps.”

**HISTORY:** In 1858 John Sloper, having patented several devices for punching out railway tickets to cancel them, turned his attention to precancelling postage stamps with companies initials. After much persuasion the Postmaster-General of Great Britain stated that he would “not object to the perforation of postage stamps” with a view to protect merchants and others, as far as possible from the theft of stamps used by them.

Thus, the perfin was born and quickly adopted by companies both large and small. This form of precancelling stamps was to be without doubt the most successful security endorsement and is still in use in some countries today.

The earliest known approval by an Australian firm to use its firm’s precancelled perforated initials was granted on 27 September 1877 by the postal department in Adelaide, South Australia to the wholesale grocers firm of D. & J. Fowler Ltd. Their two die perforator was manufactured by Joseph Sloper in 1880.

**OS PERFINS:** OS perfins issued by the various Australian state governments and following federation by the Commonwealth government and are known as **Official Perfins**. OS stands for *On Service* or *Official Service*.

OS perforated stamps were used as follows:

New South Wales 1902-1912

South Australia 1905-1912

Queensland 1905-1914

Tasmania 1902-1912

Victoria 1902-1913

Western Australia 1904-1912

Commonwealth of Australia 1913-1929

The OS perforations can be measured at various sizes and on the Kangaroo on Map of Australia issue are known as small OS and large OS.

Stamps with perfin OS NSW were used from 1902 until 1933.

**STATE PERFINS (OTHER THAN OS) POST FEDERATION:** Whilst this display does not include perfins on stamps issued by the various Australian states, bear in mind that state stamps were valid for postage until the introduction of decimalisation in 1966. The Australian states used perfin stamps as follows:

New South Wales, pattern **G NSW** 1933-1978

South Australia, pattern **SA** 1903-1912

Queensland, apparently continued to use OS issues

Tasmania, pattern **T** 1902-1977

Victoria, pattern **VG** 1933-1989

Western Australia pattern **WA** 1903-1915 and **W** 1933-1954

## **A**

There is a strong argument that mint unhinged copies of the perfins in this section may have been pilfered.

**AUSTRALIAN PRIVATE PERFINS:** Numerous Australian firms produced private perfins in an attempt to prevent illegal use or fraud by staff.

David Jones Ltd was one of the most prolific producers of private perfins. Other well-known firms include George Adams - Hobart, Anthony Hordern & Sons Ltd, Angus & Robertson, Burns Philp & Co, Elder Smith & Co Ltd, Harris Scarfe & Co, Mobil Oil Australia, International Harvester Co, Tooheys Ltd, Vacuum Oil Co and most of the Assurance companies.

I do not know of any Australian companies that currently produce private perfins.

**WORLD PERFINS:** A majority of stamp issuing countries over the years have either produced official perfins or companies located there have produced private perfins. Great Britain is the most prolific and has over 25,000 different private perfin patterns and I have 1,636 such perfins.

My collection also includes 2,113 British Commonwealth perfins from 42 different countries and my non- British Commonwealth collection 2,114 perfins from 68 different countries.

**CLUB:** For many years perfins were shunned by both the stamp trade and collectors as being worthless and you still often spot them in old albums.

However, these days there are numerous collectors in Australia and New Zealand with a very strong club – Perfin Club of New Zealand and Australia (PCNZA). The annual membership fee is \$15.00. If you would like to join the club, I can assist you.

The club produces the South Pacific Perfin Bulletin on a regular basis with very informative articles and also conducts regular postal auctions exclusively for members.

PCNZA perfins are created using the club perforator on a regular basis and this facility is also available members who supply their own stamps for perforating.

I have created free online catalogues for Australian, Australian Territories and New Zealand stamps perforated PCNZA. I have 1,336 stamps with this perfin plus many intact covers.

**PUBLICATIONS & WEBSITES:** There are several Australian publications and websites relating to perfins including:

Commercial Perfins of Australia (1992) by John Grant & John Mathews

Commercial Security Overprints of Australia by Dave Elsmore, Greg Howard and David Coath, see site:

<http://www.perfins.com.au/OZ-Revenue-Perfins/oz-precancels-index.html>

Dave Elsmore runs [www.ozrevenues.com](http://www.ozrevenues.com) & [www.perfins.com.au](http://www.perfins.com.au)

There is also a facebook site <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ozperfins/>

**STATISTICS:** Now for a few more statistics as I am a statistics person.

I have the following numbers of Official Perfins:

OS NSW 68	G NSW 2,277	Qld 10
SA 29	Tas. 18	Victoria 1,352
WA 197		

Australian Private Perfins:

Total 938 including David Jones Ltd 171 and Kodak 55. I also have 224 perfins where the user has not been identified, mainly partial strikes.

PCNZA perfins on Australian stamps 1,182.

**CONCLUSION:** I find collecting perfins both interesting and apart from some private perfins, inexpensive.

As stated before, they often turn up in old world albums and the PCNZA club has regular circuit books where an assortment of Australian private perfins can be purchased for 50 cents each.

It would be nice to have another keen perfin collector in the Wagga Stamp Club.