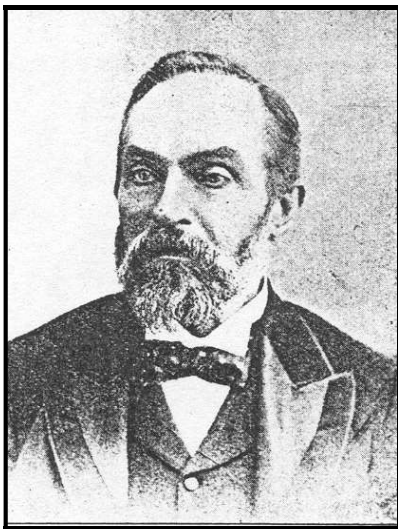


G. & R. WILLS & CO. LTD and
GEORGE WILLS & SONS
John Mathews

These two firms were part of an extensive family of companies, which also included George Wills & Sons Ltd (UK buying agents), George Wills (Inc.) (US buying agents), and George Wills (India) Ltd (buying agents in India). G. & R. Wills and Co. Ltd operated as warehousemen, importers and manufacturers of textiles and soft goods, while George Wills & Sons were ship-owners operating coastal shipping and ships on the Australia – England trade route, and merchants in Australia and New Zealand.

George Wills was born in the small village of Bridford, about 10 km west of Exeter, Devon, England, in 1825 to Thomas and Susanna Wills, and his twin brothers Henry and Richard were born in 1828. George and Henry came to South Australia in 1849, bringing with them a number of packages of drapery and set up in business in Rundle Street, Adelaide. They unpacked their goods in an allotment largely covered with scrub. Henry died in Adelaide on 22 February 1850, and George was subsequently joined by Henry's twin, Richard, who had been apprenticed to a drapery firm in Exeter, England, and the firm became G. & R. Wills.



**George Wills
(1825 – 1906)**



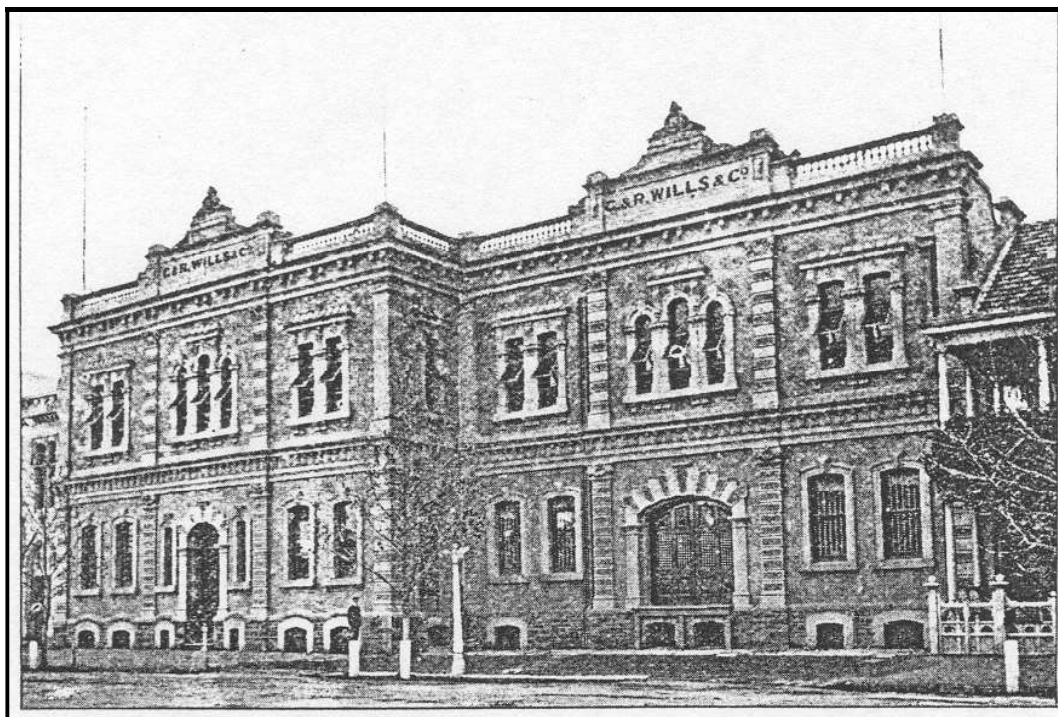
**First G. & R. Wills building,
Adelaide**

By about 1854, the business had expanded to the point where they needed to set up their own buying house in London. George returned to London at this time, got married there, and returned

to Adelaide with his wife, Lucy, the following year. Their first two children were born in Adelaide before the family again returned to London in 1858 or 1859. In 1862, Richard died in Adelaide at the age of 33 years, shortly after the birth of his only child, a son.

The 1881 Census of England lists George and his wife, Lucy, two daughters, four sons, two Australian-born nieces and five servants living in North London. Three of George's sons, George Tarlton Wills, John Henry Wills and Charles Percy Wills joined the firm and eventually became an integral part of the management team in London. George's fourth son, Arthur, became a barrister in London.

Rapid expansion saw branches in most other Australian States, including at Fremantle (1866), Hay Street, Perth (1896), Kalgoorlie (early 1890s), Broken Hill and Flinders Lane, Melbourne. Abroad they were associated with branches in London, Manchester, Liverpool, Paris, New York, San Francisco and Morocco. In 1881, they formed the shipping department into a separate company as George Wills & Sons. In 1884, G. & R. Wills & Co. joined a syndicate proposed by Anthony Hordern & Sons of Sydney to build the Great Southern Railway from Perth to the port of Albany, West Australia. This was later taken over by the West Australian Government.



**Premises of G. & R. Wills & Co. Ltd.
North Terrace, Adelaide, circa 1910.**

For a while, the company's main premises were in Grenfell Street, but a new six-storey headquarters was built on North Terrace in 1914, extending through to Rundle Street and with a total floor space of 3 acres. At the same time, it was found that the importing was too slow to keep up with demand, and then the Depression meant rapid turnover was needed to maintain profits, so they turned to local manufacture. A clothing factory was established in Pulteney Street, and a factory for boots, shoes and leather goods started in Pirie Street. They specialised in shirts, pyjamas, and industrial gloves, and the branch in India produced sheets, towels, etc. The name had become G. & R. Wills & Co. in 1913.

The shipping company, George Wills & Sons, traded in coke, iron, etc and exported lead, zinc and silver concentrates from Broken Hill to UK and Europe. During World War I, they shipped grain to UK for the British Government, and later also wheat and wool. One of the shipping lines represented by this firm was Lund's, which grew into the Blue Anchor Line, which in turn was later acquired by the Peninsular & Orient Steam Navigation Company.

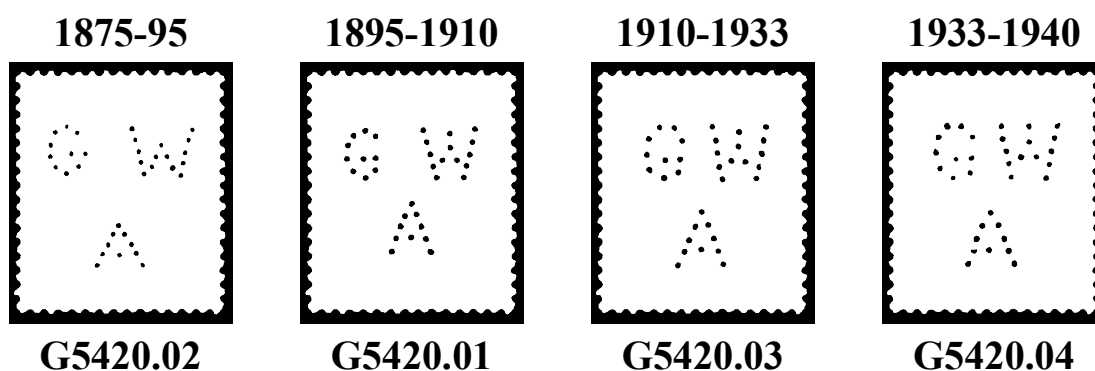
Three sons of Charles Percy Wills served with George Wills & Co. in Australia, Percy Lionel Bethune Wills and Philip Aubrey Wills from 1926 to 1927, and Richard Lloyd Joseph Wills from 1931 to 1935. All returned to England and became directors of the firm George Wills & Sons Limited.

The cover shown on the front of the Bulletin was sent from the London buying house of George Wills & Sons Ltd. in 1931 to Mr. K. A. Wills at the Gawler Place, Adelaide, headquarters of the company, and was subsequently re-directed to him at the Perth branch. Kenneth Agnew Wills, born in 1896 in Adelaide, was a grandson of Richard Wills. After his father died in 1901, his mother returned to England with the four children. In World War I, Ken served in the British Army in Europe and the Middle East, rising to the rank of Captain. After the war, he started work with the family company, George Wills & Sons Limited, canvassing for cargoes between London and Australia. In 1921, the company sent him to Australia and by 1928 he was managing director in Adelaide. In World War II, Ken joined the Australian Imperial Forces and saw service in the Middle East and Greece. Near the end of the war he was promoted to temporary Brigadier. Back in Adelaide after the war, he resumed working with

G. & R. Wills & Co., which he floated as a public company in 1946. He was chairman of the company until 1976. He was also a board member of Advertiser Newspapers Ltd., and sat on the council of the University of Adelaide. He was a benefactor who made possible the new staff club at the university in 1950, and also raised funds for the construction in 1958 of the new University Union buildings. The Wills refectory at the University of Adelaide is named after him (where your Secretary learned to play cards over lunches!!). He was knighted in 1960.

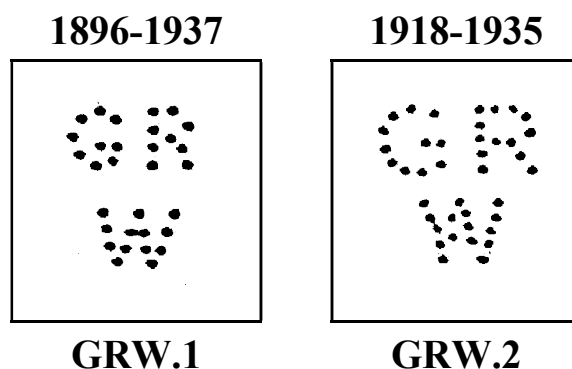
The cover bears three stamps with perfin “GW/A” (G5420.03 – “New Illustrated Catalogue of Great Britain Perfins”, by Roy Gault, in draft). Other GB “GW/A” perfins, and the company’s Australian branch perfins are shown for comparison.

Perfin Dies Used by George Wills & Sons, Ltd., London

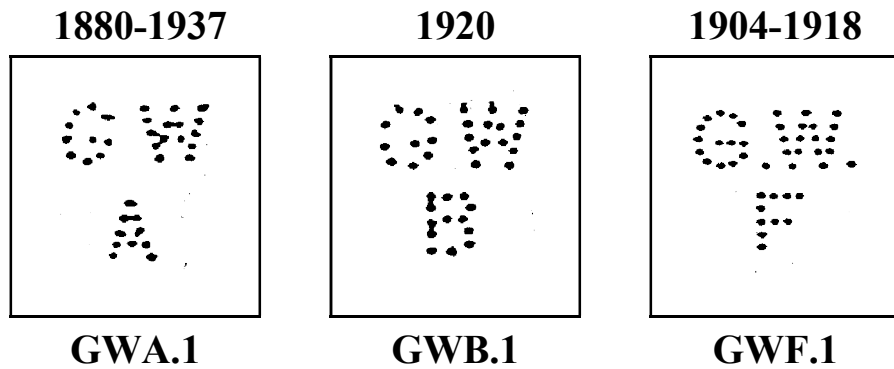


Only G5420.03 has been positively identified as used by George Wills & Sons . The other three dies are only suspected to have been used by the company. Note that George Wills & Co became George Wills & Sons Ltd between 1910 and 1914.

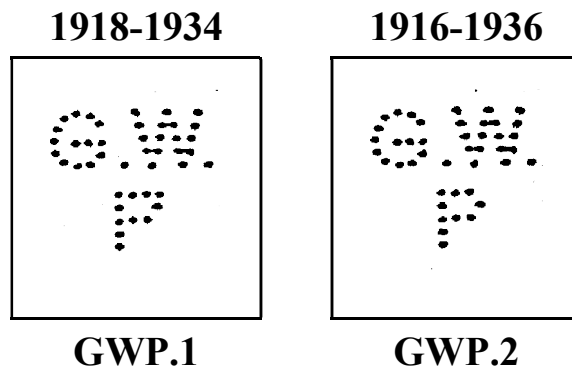
Perfin Dies Used by G & R Wills, Adelaide and Perth



Perfin Dies Used by George Wills & Co.
(A: Adelaide, B: Brisbane, F: Fremantle)



Perfin Dies Used by George Wills & Co. in Perth



Note that perfin die GWP.1 was probably made by the modification of die GWF.1 and that GWP.2 could be a partial of GWP.1 or indeed another head in a multi-head die.