

THE "PRETTY" PERFINS OF SUFFOLK

John Marriner

Members may wonder why the perfins of Suffolk are any prettier than elsewhere – well they are not. The Pretty referred to in the title are the Pretty family, who as we will see were prolific users of perfins.

This story starts when William Coleman Pretty settled in Bacton and opened a drapery store. Later in 1830 he joined up with John Footman and acquired a drapers shop in Stowmarket. In 1834 Alexander Nicholson

joined the partnership to form the company of Footman, Pretty & Nicholson, based at grand new premises of Waterloo House in Ipswich. And here

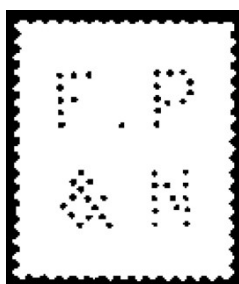
FOOTMAN, PRETTY, AND NICOLSON,
WATERLOO HOUSE,
WESTGATE STREET, IPSWICH,
ARE NOW RECEIVING THEIR
NEW PATTERNS IN CARPETS,
ALL AT THE REDUCED PRICES.

F., P., & N. feel sure that an inspection of their present Stock will secure for them that precedence, for excellency and largeness of assortment, which has been so long accorded them.
ALL THE DEPARTMENTS OF THIS ESTABLISHMENT ARE NOW BEING FILLED UP WITH

GOODS SUITABLE FOR SPRING WEAR,
At the Low Prices recently prevailing.

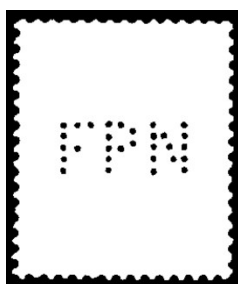
we meet our first perfin user. In 1874 they started using the die F.P/&N – F3330.01. A second die was introduced in 1890 – FPN – F3320.01.

1874 - 1911



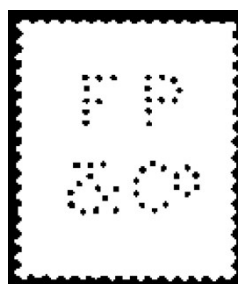
F3330.01

1890 - 1910



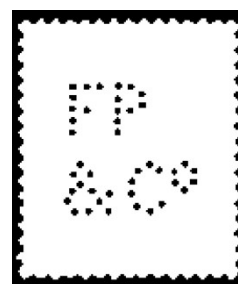
F3320.01

1905 - 1939



F3270.01

c1932



F3270.02

William Pretty Sr. had three sons, William Jr. (1842), Alfred (1847) and Edward (1854) who were destined to go into the drapery trade. The partnership with Alexander Nicholson was ended in 1889, following the death of William Sr. in the same year. However the company carried on using their two perfin dies up to the point when they became a company.

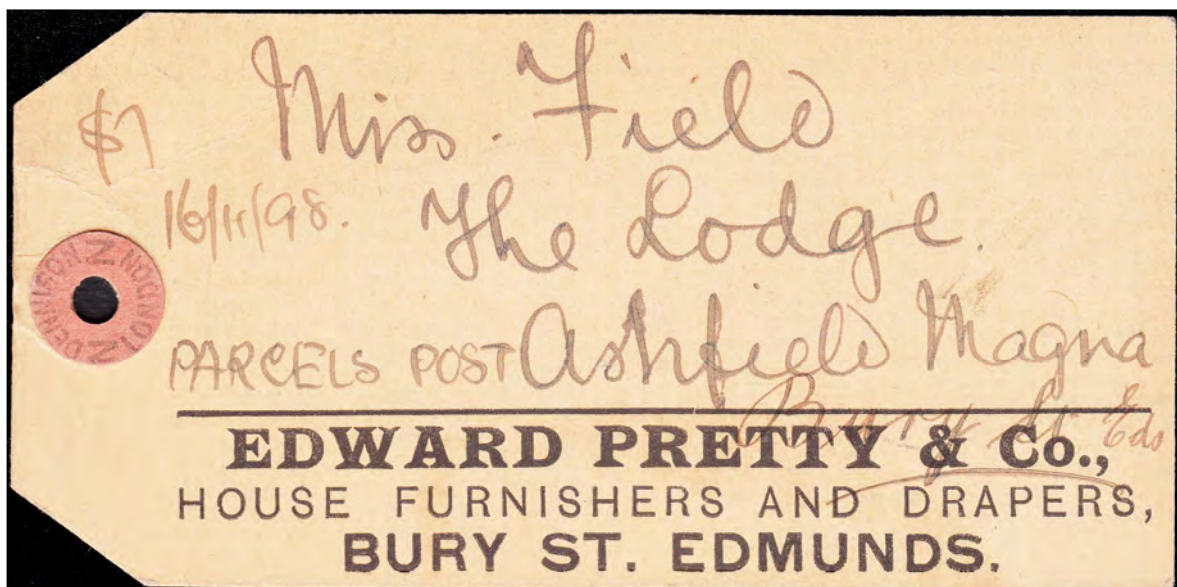


On the establishment of Footman, Pretty & Co. the old perfin dies were abandoned and a new die FP/&Co – F3270.01 was introduced. A short lived die F3270.02 is also known but lasted only for a year or so.

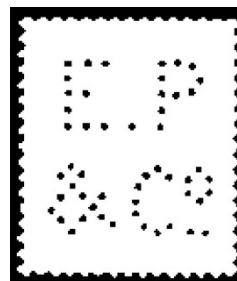


Now while all this was going the youngest brother Edward Pretty was running his own company of house furnishers and drapers in Bury St. Edmonds. He took over the company of E.E. Clayton in February 1880 but wasn't to adopt perfins until

1895 when E3494.01 appears. The parcel label shown below was used November 16th 1898 and is the user identifying piece for this die. The reverse has a 3d Jubilee with the Bury St. Edmonds cancellation.



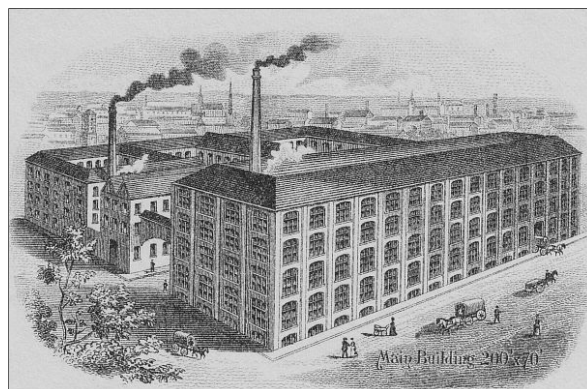
1895 - 1922



E3494.01

Footman, Pretty & Nicholson, as drapers during the Victorian era, clearly had a significant part of their sales in corsets. Rather than buying in other peoples products they decided to make their own. Initially they set up a factory at the back of Waterloo House which

was run by William Pretty Jr. However it very soon became evident that there was a huge demand for their products and their limited production facilities could not cope. So with financing from his father he constructed a new factory in Ipswich in 1881. A separate company, William Pretty & Sons was established who produced corsets under the “Oktis” brand. The company used two perfin dies W.P. - W5870.01 and WP/&S – W6050.01. This later die is a Braham production and a copy of a proof strike 2020 has been recorded.

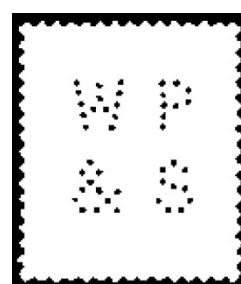


1890–1910 / 1929

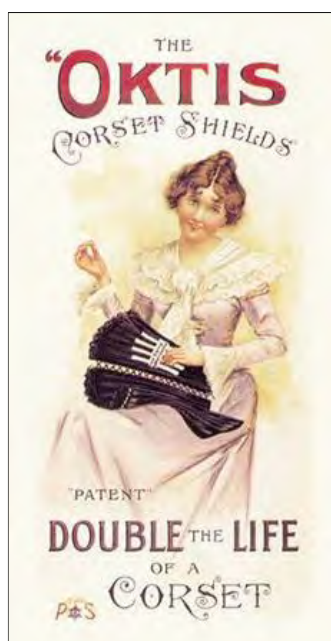


W5870.01

1890 - 1945



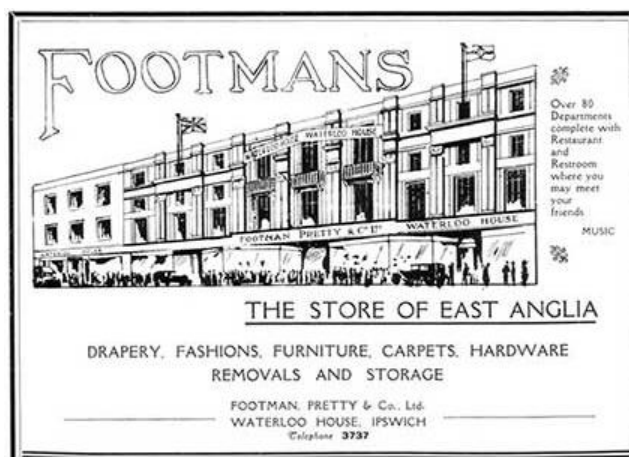
W6050.01



Sadly for the Prettys, the era of wearing corsets gradually came to an end. Factors like the women’s Suffragette movement, the “Dress Reform Society”, the new roles of women in war work during the First World War and a paper written by the British Medical Association all discouraged women from strapping themselves up tightly for the sake of fashion. Corset factories began to make rayon and silk underwear and Liberty bodices. In 1930 William Pretty and Sons went into liquidation but the company was taken over by another corset maker Symingtons, who retained the company name. This explains the continued use of perfin die W6050.01 up until

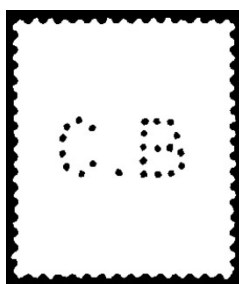
1945 although die W5870.01 seems to have been abandoned at this time.

However Footman, Pretty & Co went from strength to strength. In 1927 the company was registered as a limited company with a capital of £500,000. The limited company was set up to acquire the businesses of Footman, Pretty & Co, Gardiner & Co, J. Howells & Co and Frederick Fish & Son and provide direct control of E. Pretty & Co and Curl Bros Ltd.



Nearly all these companies were also perfin users as can be seen in the die illustrations below.

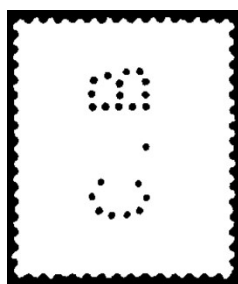
1902 - 1915



C0470.03

Curl Bros.

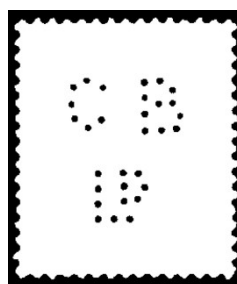
1885 - 1905



C0470.03A

Curl Bros. *

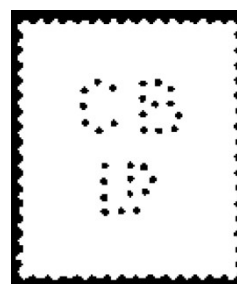
1945 - 1980



C0850.01

Curl Bros.

1941 - 1945



C0850.01a

Curl Bros.

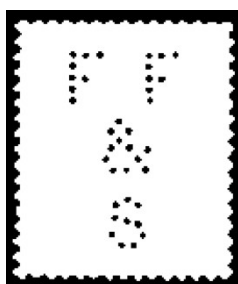
1876 - 1879



C0900.01

Curl Bros. *

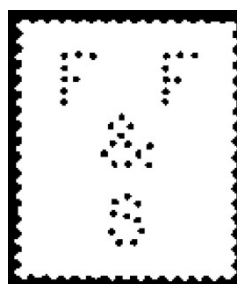
1895 - 1912



F1520.01

Frederick
Fish & Co*

1895 - 1922



F1520.02

Frederick
Fish & Co

1895 - 1910



G0160.01

Gardiner & Co

About this time the store at Waterloo House was rebranded as Footmans. Footmans in turn was to become part of Debenhams and to date has survived the shutdown of stores and remains at Waterloo House.