

WILLIAM EDWARDS

Silversmith

London and Sydney

John Hawkins

Until recently it has been accepted that the Melbourne silversmith, William Edwards, plied his trade purely within the confines of Australia. Research for my forthcoming book on Australian silver, however, proves him to have had a career as a manufacturing goldsmith and silversmith in London, registering his mark at the Goldsmiths Hall.

Fine London-made claret jug by William Edwards, 1852. The jug bears many similarities to the basket shown opposite — the exotic birds, the rustic handle and the cagework body with glass, in this case frosted, centre (picture courtesy Sotheby's)



William Edwards was the grandson of John Edwards of Wimbledon, tailor. His Father, Thomas William Edwards, was apprenticed on 3 June 1789 to the well-known London goldsmith, John Robins of Aldersgate Street. The date of his father's Freedom is unrecorded but he entered his mark as a plate worker on 21 August 1816 from an address at 7 Frog Lane, Islington. He worked at various addresses, as noted by his registering a second mark on 25 October 1822. His third mark was registered on 1 November 1822 and, finally, a fourth mark on 10 April 1823 used at his last address, 23 Ratcliffe Road, St Lukes, where he moved on 18 January 1836.

William Edwards, his son, registered his mark² at the Goldsmiths Hall as a small worker on 7 January 1843, giving his father's address 23 Radcliffe (sic) Road, St Lukes. William Edwards remained at this address until moving to 19 Sekeforde Street, Clerkenwell, on 11 March 1846.

From this address, he continued to manufacture silver until 1857. In 1858 the premises were empty³ but were reoccupied by George Edwards, William's brother, in 1859.

George registered his mark in 1858⁴ at the Goldsmiths Hall. The empty address in 1858 at Sekeforde Street ties up well with the known arrival in Melbourne of William Edwards aboard the *Blanch Moore* from London in July 1857.

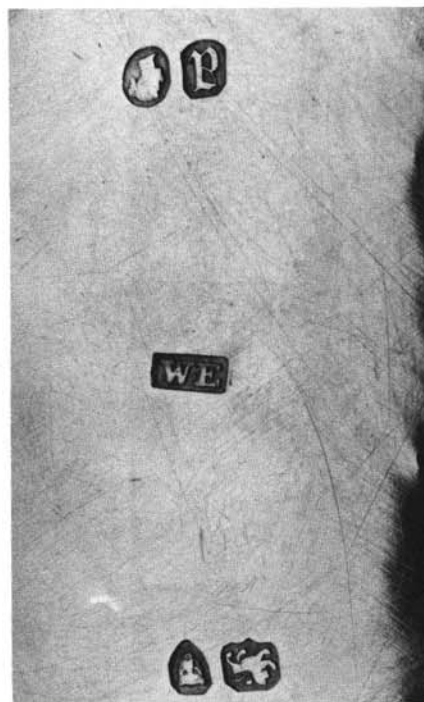
Edwards is listed as a gentleman, having travelled in the chief cabin which was reserved for the well-to-do or notable. Unfortunately, this denies us the usual personal particulars other than he was aged 38. It is interesting to note that he was a subscriber to the Goldsmiths Benevolent Institution and the donations list for the years 1843-71 notes William Edwards, Esq., 31 Upper Phillimore Place, Kensington, as giving between the years 1850-56 the sum of ten guineas

every year and an annual subscription of one guinea.

Subscriptions to the Goldsmiths Benevolent Institution could be made only by a goldsmith whose mark was registered at the Goldsmiths Hall.

Robert Garrard in the year 1856 paid the sum of 145 pounds and Sebastian Garrard paid 86 guineas. The fact that his name in the Benevolent Institution Donations List is given as William Edwards, Esq., implies that he was not a working goldsmith but had gained his Freedom by redemption or patrimony. Edwards was not apprenticed to a member of the Goldsmiths Company, a fact that tends to confirm his status as a gentleman. It may be surmised that Edwards was running a manufacturing firm and not working at the bench.

William Edwards' London marks

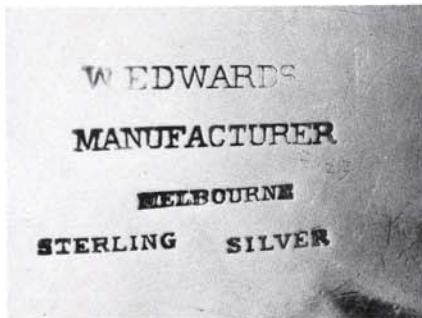




London-made, swing-handle basket with original ruby glass liner by William Edwards, London 1856, bearing the crest and coronet of the Dukes of Northumberland



A swing-handled basket manufactured by William Edwards, possibly in Melbourne, and retailed by Walsh & Sons before 1861. It is marked with Edward's standard mark of an emu W.E. kangaroo, the W.E. overstepping the English maker's mark B.S. showing that the basket has been manufactured from another piece of silver. The basket is further stamped 'William Edwards, Manufacturer, Melbourne'



William Edwards' Melbourne mark

He maintained his Upper Phillimore Place residence, it being listed as occupied by a Mrs Edwards from 1862 to 1875. Edwards arrived single in Australia so it may well have been family matters that caused this separation. He is given as the rate payer until 1861 at 31 Upper Phillimore Place, which was, incidentally, a four-storey terrace house adjoining the entrance to the Fox Mansion, Holland Park, in Kensington High Street. The block of terrace houses in Phillimore Place took over 20 years to build and the final result was "aesthetically satisfactory for they were excellent examples of Georgian terrace design."⁵ They were demolished in 1931.

It can be seen, then, that Edwards was in fact a silversmith by descent, his father being apprenticed to John Robins. On his father's death, he continued the business in the capacity of a gentleman by virtue of the assets inherited from his father. A working craftsman would not maintain a high social profile or own a fine house in Kensington High Street if he worked at the bench. It may be surmised that having had no children and a possibly unhappy marriage, he decided to emigrate to Australia spurred on by the news of gold finds and the rapidly accumulating wealth of the city of Melbourne. He may have brought with him some of the craftsmen and workmen from Sekeforde Street to start his major manufacturing business in Victoria. His brother, Thomas, continued working from the Sekeforde Street address until 1864.

The fact that Thomas remained in London at the old business premises may account for a number of pieces bearing Edwards' Australian mark which are particularly English in feeling and style. Items such as the teapot illustrated may have a non-Australian identity despite their marks. Here we have one of the few Australian craftsmen who had the ability to produce from a family business in England and sell through an importing and wholesale business



Detail of birds to the reverse of basket

in Melbourne. It was this strength and experience that gave Edwards control within a very short space of time of the manufacturing and supply of silver in Melbourne to firms such as Brush and MacDonnell, Walsh & Sons, Kilpatrick & Co and Josephs of Sandhurst. Objects made in Melbourne between 1858 and 1862 should be viewed circumspectly as to origin.

I recently purchased in London the basket illustrated bearing Edwards' London marks. This I have sold to the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences in Sydney where it is displayed alongside a nearly identical basket bearing Edwards' Melbourne marks — William Edwards/Manufacturer/Melbourne.

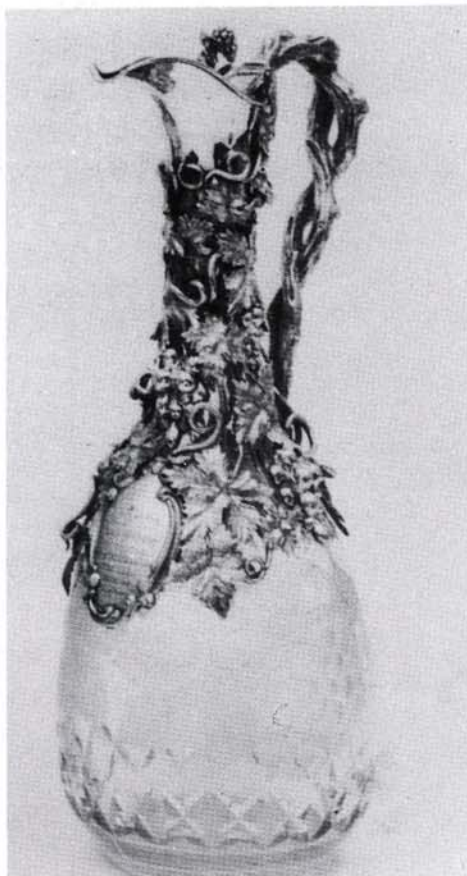
REFERENCES

1. London Goldsmiths 1697-1837, Their Marks and Lives, by A.G. Grimwade, p.502
2. The Goldsmiths Register of Marks, Vol.V, p.141
3. The Post Office, London, Directories.
4. The Goldsmiths Register of Marks, Vol.VI, p.77
5. The Survey of London, Vol. XXVII, illustrated p.44



On the evidence of the existing pair of baskets, this teapot might well have been made in London and marked in Melbourne

Unusual jug of mannerist rococo inspiration by William Edwards 1847. Note the use of a quatrefoil type foot, a hallmark of his silver later produced in Australia (picture courtesy Sotheby's)



London-made claret jug by William Edwards 1856 (picture courtesy Sotheby's)

