

**The Story Of**

**METTERS**

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**Seventy-five years** ago, Fred Metters, son of an English migrant, set up a foundry in Adelaide, and began making fuel stoves.

This enterprise has grown into General Industries Limited, a subsidiary of which is Metters Limited, Australia's largest home appliance manufacturer, with plants in four States of the Commonwealth and one in New Zealand.

The original handful of employees has grown to a staff of more than 4,000.

In 1891 Fred Metters patented the "top-fire" fuel stove, a radically improved cooker at that time, and, to promote sales, he toured South Australia demonstrating the stove at country shows.

The business grew so well that, in 1893, he opened an office and showroom in Rundle Street, in the heart of Adelaide.

Over the next few years came the rush to the Western Australian gold-fields and Fred Metters, realising the sales potential for his stove in that State, decided to open a sales branch in Perth, where he obtained premises which at that time were being leased by a Henry Langdon Spring.

Henry Spring, an Englishman who had spent several years on the London Stock Exchange before migrating to Australia, could see the possibilities in Metters' business and decided to give up his own business in order to become a clerk for Fred Metters.

The demand for stoves increased so quickly that, in 1896, Metters opened a factory in Perth.

In 1897, Henry Spring's brother, Robert Alexander Spring, arrived from England and became assistant to the manager of the Perth factory.

In 1898, Fred Metters made Henry Spring a partner and the business became known as Metters and Company. From then on, for many years, Henry Spring was the main driving force of the organisation.

After Federation in 1901, with protective tariffs operating throughout Australia and with trade reviving after the financial crash of the late 1890's, the two partners decided that they should investigate the possibilities of the Eastern States' market.

Feeling that Queensland would probably offer the most promising field, they decided at first to visit Brisbane. But on reaching Sydney they were so impressed with the opportunities offering there that they proceeded to set up a small factory in Alice Street, Newtown, where they commenced production early in 1902. They then opened a city showroom in a basement under the Y.M.C.A. in Bathurst Street.

The beginnings were small—the first N.S.W. catalogue was just one page, showing a "top-fire" stove on one side and coppers and frames on the other.

Demand soon outstripped the production capabilities of the little Newtown factory, and in 1906 the company bought 20 acres of land in Alexandria, where a new plant was built.

In 1907, Fred Metters sold his interest in the company to Henry Spring and the company, Metters Limited, with a nominal capital of \$200,000 was formed in Adelaide. Soon the Adelaide plant became inadequate, and in 1911 a new factory was built on 20 acres of land in Henley Beach Road.

In the same year, after the State Government had resumed the original site, the Perth factory was rebuilt on a larger scale on 14 acres of land in Subiaco.

That year the nominal capital of Metters Ltd. was increased to \$400,000 and the shares of the company were placed on the official list of the Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney Stock Exchanges.

By 1913, the N.S.W. branch had outgrown its offices and showroom



in Sydney and the company erected its own building on the present site in Elizabeth Street.

At the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Metters' products included gas and fuel stoves and other domestic appliances and agricultural machinery, water tanks, etc. During the war, large quantities of cooking equipment were produced for the armed services.

Diversification, begun before the war, continued when, in 1918, Metters purchased the business of R. Foreman and Sons, of Hobart, Tasmania, manufacturers of porcelain-enamelled baths, and the manufacturing of baths, basins and sinks was brought to Sydney.

In 1919 the company's capital was increased to \$800,000.

A great step forward in production methods was taken in 1922 when the bath foundry at Alexandria was equipped with sandslinger moulding machines, the first use of this type of equipment in the Southern Hemisphere. So efficient were these machines that four men could turn out 40 bath castings a day, instead of six as previously.

Capital of the company was increased again in 1924 — this time to \$2,000,000.

The company entered the manufacturing field in New Zealand when, in 1926, it purchased a controlling interest in an existing bath manufacturer, Porcelain Enamellers of New Zealand, and the name of that company was changed to Metters (N.Z.) Ltd.

In 1927, Metters amalgamated with K.F.B. Foundry Ltd., a company manufacturing stoves, coppers, grates, etc., and the holding company, General Industries Ltd., was formed.

Products now included baths, basins, sinks, stoves (gas, electric and fuel), heating stoves, grates, agricultural equipment, windmills, tanks and kitchenware.

After the formation of General Industries Ltd., it was decided that the company should commence manufacturing in Victoria. A site was purchased and a factory built at Footscray.

The Sydney plant was extended again in 1937, using 10 acres of land adjoining the Alexandria site.

During World War II the production of household requirements was greatly curtailed, and Metters swung over to a varied range of heavy-duty cooking equipment and to other needs of the armed services. In the post-war years the company resumed its production of domestic appliances and other products and moved further into the home electrical appliance field.

In 1954, a company manufacturing refrigerators in Sydney was purchased and a subsidiary of General Industries Ltd., known as Sovereign Appliances Pty. Ltd., was formed.

The site of the present appliance division in Gow Street, Bankstown, was acquired in 1956 and a plant was built to manufacture refrigerators and television sets. Television sets were manufactured by Admiral of Australia (Pty.) Ltd., a company owned jointly by General Industries Ltd. and Admiral International of Chicago, U.S.A.

In 1955, a company producing electric elements for the appliance trade, Grimwood, Electrical Products Pty. Ltd., was purchased and this company, as a subsidiary of General Industries Ltd., continues to produce elements of a very high standard, which are used in Metters own appliances and widely within the trade.

During 1958, another subsidiary was acquired, Ferro Precision Pty. Ltd. This company, with foundries in Lidcombe and Carrington, manufactures cast iron pipes and fittings and its products are supplied throughout



the Commonwealth and to several export markets.

A further subsidiary was formed early in 1961, General Tubing Pty. Ltd. This company's plant incorporates all the latest devices for the manufacture of special small-diameter tubing used in so many industries today and particularly used in elements for Metters' appliances.

General Tubing has been quick to take advantage of Government incentive schemes to boost export trade, and today exports form a valuable part of its contribution to General Industries.

In 1962, when the production of television sets by Admiral of Australia ceased, it was decided that facilities for the production of gas and electric ranges and other domestic appliances should be transferred from Alexandria to Bankstown. General Industries Ltd. had, in 1961, purchased Admiral International's shareholding in Admiral of Australia and now owned the whole of the factory at Bankstown, which gave the opportunity for setting up a comprehensive appliance operation all under the one roof. Early in 1964, fire destroyed one-third of the plant at Bankstown. This has since been rebuilt and extended and the company now has the most modern domestic appliance plant in Australia, with technical standards equal to any in the world.

Over the last few years the Grimwood Electrical Products subsidiary has built up a very considerable export trade, particularly to the United Kingdom and in the year 1965, we saw the formation of a wholly-owned subsidiary of the same name, Grimwood Electrical Products Pty. Ltd., in the United Kingdom and the building of a factory for the production of elements at Skelmersdale, near Liverpool, England.

A full circle . . . little did Fred Metters think when he started his small business in Australia 75 years ago, that the day would come when the \$10 million company of which he was actually the founder would be commencing the manufacture of at least one of its products in his own home country, England.

As our group progresses, not only do we have new product developments and new techniques of manufacture but also new materials which can have an important bearing on the direction of our expansion.

Whilst the Company has used plastics in many of its products since early years, it was only in 1966 that it was felt necessary for the Company to make a move into the plastics industry with the purchase of a majority holding in Iplex Plastic Industries of Adelaide. This Company, owned by the Menzell family had been active in the development of plastics in plumbing, the motor industry and other areas for thirty years.

It was logical that Metters, the largest manufacturers of cast iron pipes and fittings for soil and waste should extend its activities in this field using plastic materials.

So as to quickly reach a stage of prominence in the plastic plumbing industry, General Industries joined with Key Terrain Ltd. a Division of Reed Paper, in turn owned by the International Publishing Company of England. The Metters/Iplex Plastic plumbing products now hold a major share of the plastic plumbing industry in Australia.

In 1967, to add to the range of plastic plumbing products General Industries acquired J. Walker (Holdings) who were the leaders in Australia in the manufacture of polypropylene traps and fittings.

These products, together with those manufactured by Iplex in Adelaide give Metters Branches throughout Australia a full range of plastic plumbing to offer to merchants.