

HOBBY HISTORY

1931 Agreement Between Swedish Match and Bryant & May Australia

by Jerry Bell, Editor, AMCCS

In the course of some recent research on the Federal Match Company [Australia], I chanced on a copy of the 1931 Agreement between Swedish Match and Jonopings & Vulcans on the one hand, and Bryant & May Melbourne and the Federal Match Company on the other, which fundamentally shaped the course of the Australian Match Industry for thirty years thereafter.

The background to this agreement was that in the years leading up to 1930, Sweden had accounted for over 55% of all our imports of wooden safety matches into Australia from 1906 onwards, which was the first year records had been collected. Even more recently, it had been over 80% in the period 1921-1929. From 1921 onwards, Australia had anti-dumping legislation called the "Industries Preservation Act", which prevented matches being imported into Australia at a price lower than the domestic wholesale price of matches. Swedish exporters had never run afoul of this, but in 1930, a shipment from Russia, probably of "Criterion" matches, was landed below the domestic wholesale price, consequently the Government (Scullin's) doubled duties one week, and suspended all imports the next.

This caused Swedish Match some distress, as it had very carefully built up a strong following for certain brands in Australia, many of which were exclusive to local businesses. As the months went past, there appeared to be little momentum to re-introduce imports, as local manufacturers were very happy with the situation.

Swedish Match, therefore, proposed to Bryant & May and Federal that they should manufacture the

more important Swedish labels in Australia under licence, and that Swedish Match would withdraw from the import market for the next 21 years. In return, Swedish Match became a substantial shareholder in both local businesses.

This agreement had two important outcomes. Firstly, when imports were eventually resumed in 1933, with Sweden out of the way, they were never again a serious competitive threat to the local factories until the Industries Preservation Act was eventually repealed in 1967, and quantities of low cost Korean imports arrived.

Secondly, and more importantly for collectors, a series of labels were subsequently produced by Bryant & May, Federal, and W A Match which were known as "Trummer" labels, and which were Swedish designs "Made in Australia". The Bryant & May Catalogue tells us that "Trummer" was the agent of the Swedish Match Company for the British Commonwealth, based in London. All Trummer labels were originally made in Sweden, and most were the property of Swedish Match, although two, "Syr-reb" and "Bulldog" belonged to Australian businesses. Some "Trummer" labels are illustrated here.

