

# Burgon & Ball Co. Shears (Sydney)

By Neil Searle

In 1730, **Burgon & Wilkinson Ltd.**, Late, Wilkinson & Sons (Grimesthorpe, near Sheffield) Est. 1730.

**Charles Burgon**, (1832-1894) a cutlery manufacturer (Cutlery; 'that which cuts', can be anything from pocket knives, to scissors, ice skates and scythes.) The company was established in 1730 by John Burgon.

**James Ball**, (1824-1904) described in some indexes as a scythe maker, patents a manufacturing process for the production of solid steel sheep shears. The design uses the best cast steel rather than the more usual iron blades of the time. Burgon and Ball then form a partnership in 1866. They were then both at the Globe Works, Penistone Road, Sheffield, which was occupied at the time by a number of "little mesters". In 1873 they bought a site at Malin Bridge, Sheffield and by 1877 they were established in La Plata Works. In the latter part of the 19th century the company patented a design for hand sheep shears and in one year sold over 300,000 pairs exporting to South America, North America, Australia, The West Indies and New Zealand.

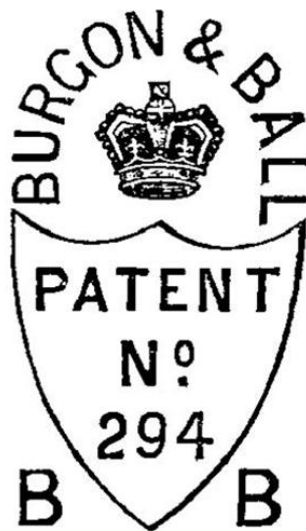


**Fig. 1.** My small pair of shears, a total length of 5" which includes a blade length of 2 ½". On both blades is '**BURGON SS Co, SYDNEY**' which relates to the company name on the metal sign as shown in Fig.2. (Sheep shears are generally around 14" long) I did query these shears with Burgon & Ball in Sheffield, their response at the end of the article.

Conventional blade shears can come with a single bow, double bows or inverse bows. Double bow shears are by far the most common as they are the most versatile. Single bow shears and inverse bowed shears offer more resistance and are mostly only used for tough shearing sheep.



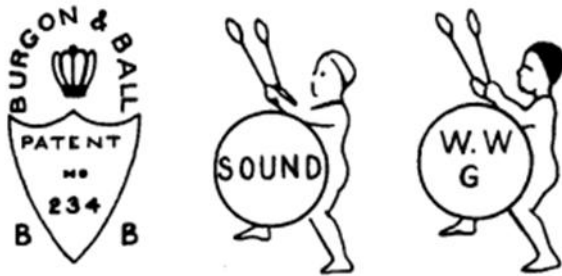
**Fig. 2.** This enamel sign sold by auction in North West Victoria, Australia for AU\$1400 in 2022. The Burgon Sheep Shearing Machine Company, 73 Macquarie Street & Circular Quay, Sydney.



**Fig. 3. Trade Mark.** 26<sup>th</sup> September, 1903. 'Filed 21<sup>st</sup> August, A.D. 1903.-Burgon and Ball, Limited, of La Plata Works, Malin Bridge, Sheffield, England, manufacturers, to register in Class 12, in respect of Sheep, Garden and other shears, Sickles, Horse and other Clippers, and Edge Tools generally, a Trade Mark of which the following is a representation '

Also from 1903, the trademark in Australia was the crown shield in abeyance at this stage in time. In Canada the trademark began with Crown shield, Gidgee, then, Drummers Boy. The USA, the Wilkinson Marks and Crown and Shield. Trade Marks were applied for in different states in Australia from 1896.

BURGON & BALL  
 Malin Bridge, Sheffield  
 ca. 1874 - (1919)  
 Cutlery, including knives, forks, etc.  
 Ref. 1892, 1919, 1974



**Fig. 4.** Trade marks on base-metal tableware. Charles Burgon's career began as a cutlery manufacturer. Notice the Drummer Bog logo continued to be used on shears, shown in Fig.5.



**Fig. 5.** Advertisement for Burgon and Ball's Drummer Boy and Battle Axe Brand.

The iconic Burgon and Ball, "Drummer Boy" sheep shears of 1730, a design which has remained largely unchanged for over 270 years, are an excellent example of innovation that delivered a uniquely functional user experience. Industrial developments in metal forming in early 18th century England meant that sheet metal could be manipulated in such a way as to induce elastic feedback through hot rolling techniques. The function was in many ways derived from the form. Interestingly, it is the manufacturing process and material properties that allow the form to be expressed at all.



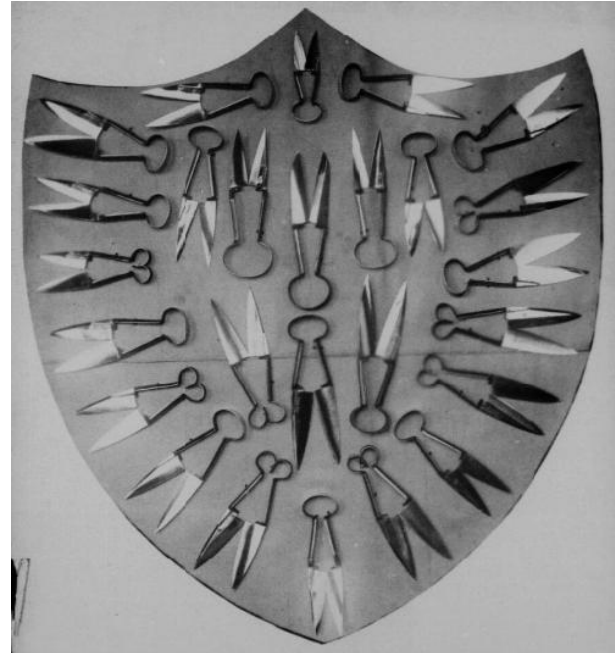
Many other well-known companies manufactured sheep shears, among them edge tool maker, Isaac Greaves. Some other well-known makers were Ward & Pane in Sheffield (1884), Lockwood Brothers Ltd., Sheffield (1894). Robert Sorby, Sheffield. (used Browns Patent) William Wilkinson & Sons. W.P. Wards, Sheffield. W.A. Tyzack. Spear & Jackson. G. Linley & Son. Burys & Co. Ltd. William Marples.



**Fig. 6.** Exhibition stand of Burgon & Ball at Norwich 1911. 'Special Colonial prices, ask for testimonials from New Zealand, Australia, South America, Africa'  
New Zealand agents were listed as Andersons Limited, Christchurch and Wellington.

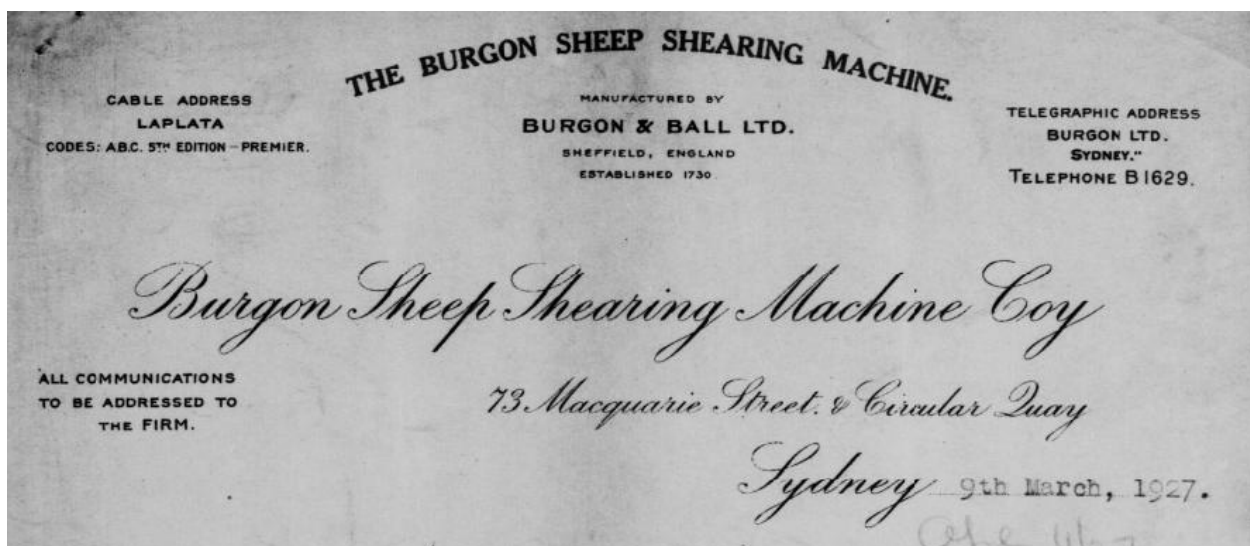


**Fig. 7.** Letterhead showing the many awards from different exhibitions around the world.

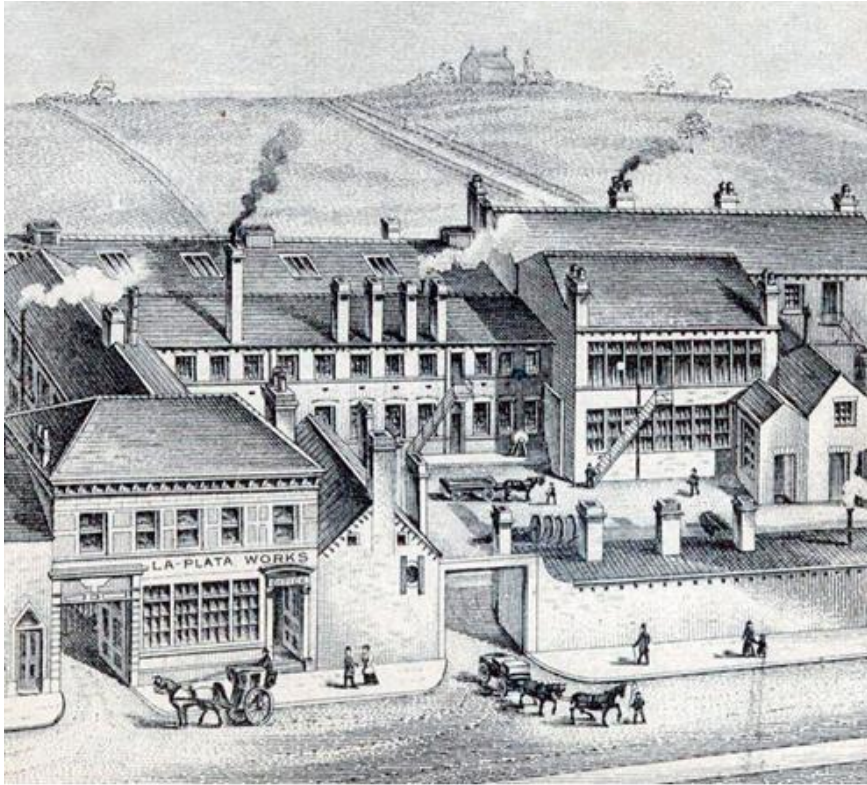


**Fig. 8.** By 1920 the firm was producing more garden shears than sheep shears and it has continued to diversify into garden tools over the years.

In 1894 Charles Burgon died and his death was followed by a dispute between his two sons, Harry and Fred. Frederic tried to carry on the business and in 1898 it became a limited company with financial backing from Daniel Doncaster & Co, Sheffield. Harry went into partnership with William Wilkinson and Sons which then became Burgon and Wilkinson. William Wilkinson and Sons were certainly making sheep shears at the time of the Great Exhibition in 1851. Burgon and Wilkinson went bankrupt in 1899. Burgon and Ball bought its assets from the liquidators, keeping the trade but selling off the Spring Works in Grimesthorpe, Sheffield.



**Fig. 9.** The Burgon Sheep Shearing Machine Co. letterhead. This company was based in Sydney.



**Fig. 10.** Still family-run, La Plata Works at Malin Bridge in Sheffield. The new factory build in 1873, is next to the River Loxley, which provides the power for production, until steam and later electricity take over. Burgon & Ball still manufactures at these premises. This makes Burgon & Ball the UK's oldest manufacturer of garden tools and accessories.

The name La Plata is a seaport in eastern Argentina. There were substantial exports to South America (possibly explaining the name "La Plata")

Records show that Burgon & Ball from 1903-1906 built automobiles - possibly with mostly French components. Models were named 'La Plata'.

In 1897, a world record was recorded. A man from Ahtanum in Washington State, USA ' has shorn 3,654 sheep with one pair of hand sheep shears' The shears were Burgon & Ball's Hind's Patent hollow-ground, razor edge and perforated shank shears.



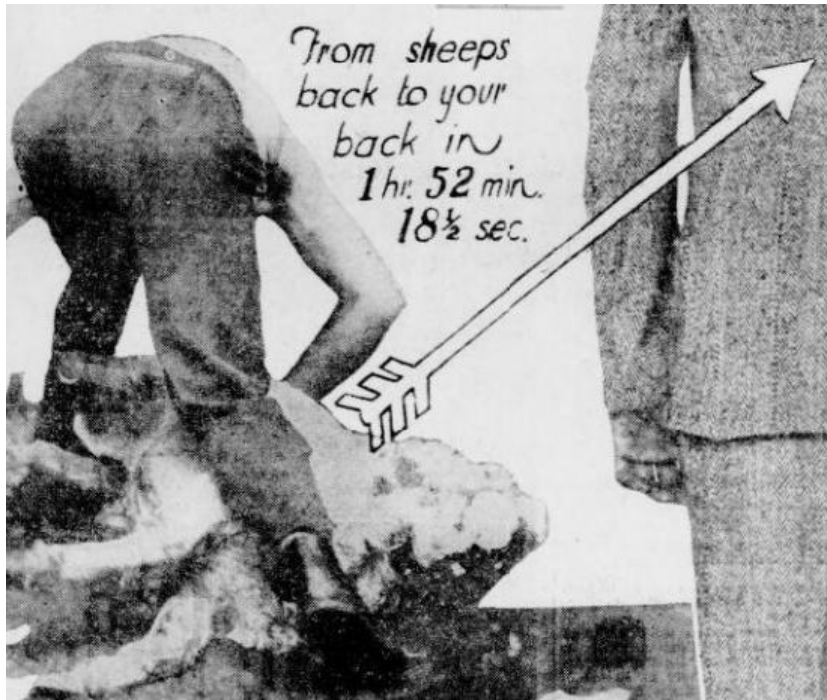


**Fig. 11.** Burgon & Ball/ Burgon Sheep Shearing Machine Co. at 73 Macquarie Street & Circular Quay, Sydney. Photograph, circa 1890.

**To more modern times.**



**Fig. 12.** Australia's first patent for a shearing machine was granted to James Higham in 1867, comprising a hand-held comb and mechanised cutter, in 1868.  
Photo courtesy of Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences, NSW, Australia.



**Fig. 13.** 'Smith's Weekly' Oct.31, 1931. 'Sydney beats world record from sheeps back' The previous record was held by the Union Mills of John Crowther & Sons, Yorkshire of 2 hours, nine minutes 46 seconds.

**Burgon & Ball, reply** (abridged) *'We don't have much info on the Burgon machine at all, I'm afraid, and none on the formation of a Burgon Sheep Shearing Machine Co. We did sell from an office in Sydney, but I've only ever seen it described as a Burgon & Ball Australian office or Australian head office. I don't believe we ever manufactured in Australia, so I agree, it's likely that the shears were made in Sheffield. I've attached some images of promotional literature referencing either the Burgon machine, or the Australian office.'*

*On the red paint, our Drummer Boy shears are known for their distinctive red paint, and we still sell them today: <https://www.burgonandball.com/products/no-10-double-bow-drummer-boy>. It's interesting though that the Australian 'TUS' stamp isn't present. Maybe they were a promotional item for the new shearing machine, hoping to convert traditional hand shearers?'*

*PR and Communications Manager. Burgon & Ball*

**NOTE:** The Burgon & Ball TUS brand was developed for professional hand shearers in the late 1800s. This brand was based on the 'Trades Unionists' Sheep Shear Co-Operative Society'

In conclusion, are the shears a promotional pair or were they widely manufactured? It would be very interesting to hear if any more of these shears are in collections marked as 'BURGON SS Co, SYDNEY'

Ref: Burgon & Ball. National Library of Australia. Papers Past, govt. NZ.