

# Australian Postal History & Social Philately



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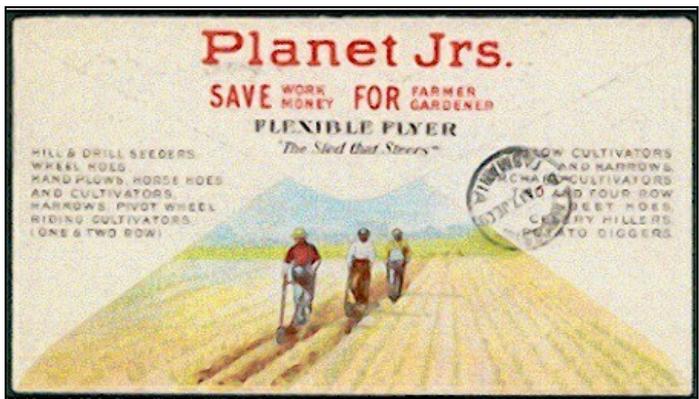
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## ALEXANDER GEORGE WEBSTER (1830 - 1914) HOBART MERCHANT

This 2d blue-green printed to private order envelope has a roller cancel HOBART/ 16.6.09/ TASMANIA on the 'Head of Victoria' embossed stamp. It is a colorful advertisement for A.G. Webster & Son, Hobart Tasmania and it shows a man tilling the earth with a Planet Jr. plough (Figure 1).



The reverse shows a Launceston arrival postmark on 17 JE 09, and has additional adverts covering a list of numerous garden and farm implements, as well as a picture of 3 men using the same ploughs, painted by the same artist on the front (Figure 2).



Alexander Webster was a Hobart merchant who was born on 3 December 1830 in London. He spent two years at Cape of Good Hope with his mother and sister before they sailed to Sydney in the *Roxburgh Castle*, and they arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1840. He was educated at the Melville Street school in Hobart Town and at a private boarding-school at Kempton, he was also a pupil of the artist, T.E. Chapman. Later as an amateur he exhibited both water colours and pencil drawings of the Tasmanian landscape. From the age of 14 he worked at several occupations, and in 1856 he ran a business in partnership with John Tabart, trading as Tabart & Webster. In November 1859 at Hobart he married Louisa Harriett Turnley, and they had eight children.

On the retirement of Tabart in 1879, Webster retained the sole interest in the firm, brought his son Charles into the business, now known as A.G. Webster & Son Ltd. From 1888, the firm published the colony's first agricultural journal, *Webster's Tasmanian Agriculturist and Machinery Gazette*, which contained reprints from various journals, including extracts from *Scientific American*, and informed articles on Tasmanian farming. By 1906 the firm had grown from a small wool and grain firm on Hobart's Old Wharf to a large business employing over a 100 men, with branch offices in Launceston, Devonport, Huonville and Burnie, Tasmania. A photo taken between 1892 and 1900 at the Old Wharf Hobart, shows A.G. Webster's sign in the background (Figure 3).





The firm, by initiating auctions came to handle most of Tasmania, wool clip for the London market. It also imported a large range of agricultural implements and steam motors. By 1910 his other sons, Edwin and Arthur, became directors. Webster had been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Tasmania in 1865, a member of its council in 1871, and its chairman in 1905. He was also a JP, chairman of directors of several companies and a trustee of the Tasmanian Museum and Botanical Gardens. He was a warden of the Marine Board, American Consul in 1877-1907 and involved in dispatching salmon ova to California. In the 1850's he was well known as an oarsman and yachtsman and in 1890 he was commodore of the Derwent Sailing Boat Club.

He was predeceased by his wife, and survived by 3 sons and 2 daughters when he died of chronic bronchitis on 4 December 1914. His estate was valued for probate at £24,427. His son Charles (1861-1936) became a vigorous managing director of the company which continued to expand until it became one of the largest in the State, with a variety of interests.

This paper was adapted from the entry on the on-line Australian Dictionary of Biography.

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