

Port Welshpool & District Maritime Museum

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W: ptwelshpoolmuseum.wix.com/pwmuseum

Peterson's Knife Factory of Port Welshpool

This story had its beginning many years ago at the Guild Knife Show, held in Melbourne.

George Nisselle, otherwise known as "Mr Pocket-knife" and a well-known face on the Australian gun and knife show circuit, handed me a box of edged Aussie-made artefacts. He's good that way, gathering old knives for me - trade blade ware mainly - because he knows I collect them and write about Australian knife history.

Most of the items in the box George passed over weren't very valuable and wouldn't attract the attention of serious knife collectors, but to me they are precious fragments of bygone era of knife manufacturing in this country. I happily rummaged through the items checking out the trademarks and styles. We cut a deal and I tucked the box under my arm. Thanks George.

In the box of goodies, 2 trade blades - a 13cm skinning knife with a timber grip and a 20cm butcher's knife without a handle - trade stamped 'Peterson Pt. Welshpool & Sydney'. The trademarks puzzled me. I had not seen it before. Finally, it gnawed at me so much that I tried to trace the origin of the trademarks.

Firstly I set about finding out where Port Welshpool is located. I discovered it is on the south coast of Victoria adjacent to Wilson's Promontory, the southernmost point of the continent.

I then rang the Victorian Police Department to find the nearest police station to Port Welshpool. My mum told me when I was a kid "If you want to know something son, ask a policeman." A policeman named Mal Heywood at the Toora cop shop was very helpful and directed me to the publican at the Welshpool Hotel. A bloke named Don Daff runs the pub and he was likewise very helpful and duly directed me to John Woolley at Port Welshpool. Four phone calls and I hit the bullseye.

John subsequently put me on to a 76 yr old life-long resident of the area, Frank Roberts. A fisherman for most of his life: Frank still fishes with his son Shane, who took over the business and now works it with his son.

Three generations all in the same boat - that's special.

Frank told me that about 60 yrs ago he worked for a couple of years with Peter Peterson at his Blacksmith factory in Port Welshpool. The foundations opposite the pub are still in evidence. He reckons Peterson was getting on a bit age wise in those days. Peterson's blacksmithing equipment ended up at Coal Creek Historic Village at Korumburra about an hour's drive away.

Peterson apparently came to Australia as a seaman from Scandinavia. He established a thriving business producing trade knives for fishermen and abattoir use and cultivating hoes and fern slashers. Peterson had contracts to sell his products via wholesalers in Melbourne and Sydney. In fact, the name of a wholesaler, Henry Berry & Co, is stamped on the butcher's knife.

The quality of Peter Peterson's blade ware was such, that he even made knives during WWII for Wilson's Promontory military camp. These knives were perhaps sterile {unmarked for commando use overseas}. More information on them is sought, as well as additional information relating to sets of butchers and slaughterman's knives. I can attest to the quality of the skinning and butcher's knives in my possession, which I have sharpened, used and steeled use.

It is believed the firm ended its cycle of existence sometime in the 1960's.

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This article was printed in the Australian Shooter Magazine in 2002. Some of Peterson's tools displayed at the Museum are from Peterson's factory that once stood proudly on the corner of Turnbull & Townsend Streets Port Welshpool.

The Museum is closed for the Winter break. But... if you can shed more light on Peter Peterson and his knife factory with stories or photos so this piece of history is not lost as the Port develops further: as we making sure history is kept alive for future generations, just call Janet 0413 199 776.