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Shining Brightly

By Viktoria Darabi

Do you remember the advertising slogan from the early 1980s, "I liked the shaver so much, I bought the company"? That was Victor Kiam, President and CEO of Remington Products, a company that he purchased after his wife bought him his first electric shaver: "Doing a Victor Kiam" has now become a term for a customer who becomes the owner of the company.

Dennis de Muth "did a Victor Kiam" with WJ Sanders. Dennis had a keen interest in antiques and one day, in 1996, a piece of silverware he wished to have restored brought him to the doors of Amor-Sanders Pty Ltd, a well-known manufacturing silversmith, goldsmith and art metal work factory in Surry Hills. When he discovered that the then owners were planning to cease business, he was distraught at the idea of one of Australia's oldest and most illustrious manufacturing silversmith workshops closing its doors for good. His fear for the knowledge and skill of their craftsmen being lost caused him to make arrangements to buy the company then and there.

Now known as WJ Sanders & Co, Master Manufacturing Silversmiths, Goldsmiths and Art Metal Workers; Dennis is keen to share the history of this great firm. As he points out framed pictures of WJ Sanders, his staff and their work hung high on →



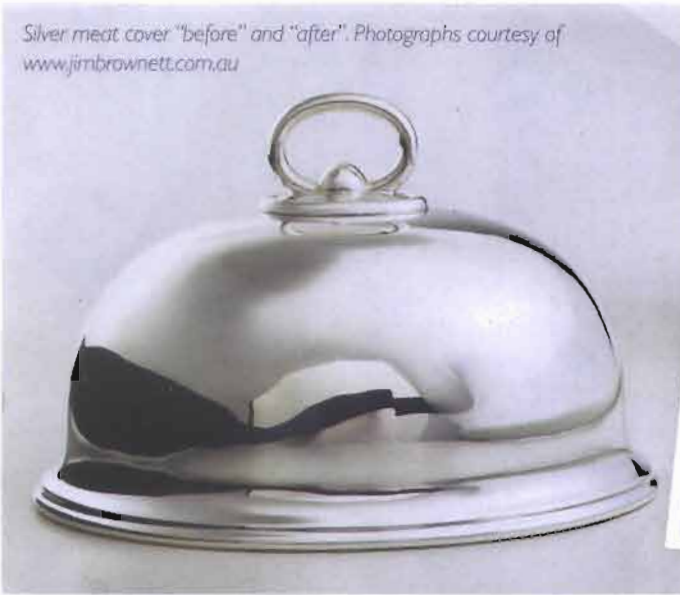
Beautiful antique silver coffee pot in pieces "before" restoration and brought back to its former glory "after". Photographs courtesy of www.jimbrownett.com.au



Above: Steve Perford, restoration silversmith, repairing a Spielter Figurine. Below: Director Dennis de Muth consults with Mat Geale on a c1890 emu egg cricket trophy restoration



Silver meat cover "before" and "after". Photographs courtesy of www.jimbrownett.com.au



Above: Matthew Mulligan "spinning" on the metal lathe.
Right: Shelves of restoration projects awaiting the craftsman's touch.



the factory wall, Dennis' pride in the craftsmen and the clean, well-organised workroom of WJ Sanders today is both palpable and apropos.

William James Sanders was born in 1885 in the jewellery district of Birmingham, England, and became an accomplished silversmith. He immigrated to Sydney in 1911 and established a business restoring and repairing metalwares for the trade. After

the outbreak of World War I, the opportunity to move into the challenge of manufacturing presented itself and he embraced it.

His firm made trinket boxes, cigarette cases, matchboxes, matchbox holders, photo frames, napkin rings, compacts, silver mesh bags and purses, sporting shields, cups and trophies. As business expanded he relocated premises and began production of tableware in sterling silver, tea and coffee services, gravy boats,



Above: Ecclesiastical Metalware Chucks are carefully stored in numbered metal boxes.
 Left: Typical restoration project — a silver tray “before” and “after”.
 Photographs courtesy of www.jimbrownett.com.au

condiment sets, tankards, jugs, christening and presentation mugs, and a great many salvers.

The majority of these pieces were produced up until World War II when his skilled craftsmen were then put to work in the production of components for the Ministry of Munitions. They resumed pre-war production in 1946 and sadly, later that year, William J Sanders' untimely death occurred. His son, John William, took over management of the company.

Their reputation as premier trophy makers was established by the early 1920s and they continued to set the standard in trophy making for horse racing and a wide range of sports including air races, yachting, rifle shooting, boxing, athletics and golfing. During

the 50s and 60s there was a great deal of church building and refurbishment so an increase in church plate and ecclesiastical metalware production ensued at WJ Sanders.

The company today has a team of around nine skilled crafts persons, who include manufacturing silversmiths, restoration silversmiths, jewellers, engineers, polishers/finishers, engravers and platers. "Our tradesmen come through jewellery or metalwork apprenticeships and we do encourage young people through the above trades," says Dennis.

Authentic restoration is labour-intensive, requires a high degree of skill, often from multiple craftsmen and is therefore costly. If you have a very precious or highly sentimental piece of metalware →

that has been left to you, you may feel it would be worth the "WJ Sanders touch" to return it to its former glory. The range of items across their work tables is extremely wide and has included old telephones, gramophones, tableware, cutlery, candlesticks, marine antiques, old medical instruments, bronze and spelter sculptures, swords, antique oil and electric lamps, church plate and furnishings, musical instruments and firemen's helmets, to name but a few.

"It was not really our everyday line of work; however, a customer begged us to restore an old Coalbrookdale setting that his ex had run over in her BMW. It had sat in his backyard rusting for 30 years," smiles Dennis.



"But without doubt the most prestigious and valuable commission was the restoration of a previously lost copy of the gold processional cross made in the early 12th century called 'The Cross Of Cong'. This restoration required 60 hours of extreme skill, patience and laborious work taking the cross apart, numbering the parts, finding and replacing missing stones, undertaking the repairs, enamelwork and sterling silver decoration, cleaning, polishing and reassembling the whole.

"The most important aspect in restoration of silver is to ensure any repair or process used is authentic. In other words, it is restored as original using the same methods as when it was created. As a manufacturing silversmith we understand the structure of the pieces we restore and that is important," Dennis explains. ❧

Viktoria Darabi: Viktoria and Chris Woolcock are members of the Hawkesbury Artisan's Trail (www.hawkesburyartisantrail.com.au). For more information phone (02) 4577-8697

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Above: Mark Russell, polisher, examines The Richmond Trophy he is working on. Left: An engraved crest on a silver meat cover.

Below: Mat Geale, jeweller, polishes up an 800 European Silver Cigarette box.

