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Telegraphic Address:
"Chronometers, Newcastle"

R. F. WHITTEN

(Winston Churchill Fellow)

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Member:

Horological Guild of Australasia
Craft Member, British Horological Institute
British Nautical Instrument Trade Assoc.
American Watchmakers' Institute
British Watch & Clockmakers' Guild
Societa Swiss de Chronometria

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In 1956 and out of work with £11.10.0 in the bank and no prospect of employment, in the corner of a small office near Civic Station in Hunter Street Newcastle the business of R.F.Whitten was established and open for business

With no main street aspect or public view some thought was given to how to let people know where they could get good watch repairs done so it was decided that a one page letter be cut on a Gestetner stencil and produce 100 copies for distribution. Addresses were obtained by random selection from the Newcastle Telephone Directory of addresses of private homes and not businesses.

Two days later a phone call was received from a gentleman who advised that he had received one of the letters and enquired if there was any interest in doing clock repairs.... most watch repairers do not happily do clock repairs due to the fact that due to the time and complexity of the repairs one does not usually receive an amount of money in comparison with the time taken on the repair and one gets much more from watches than clocks, however after consideration that there was no work coming in that clock repairs would be acceptable.

The gentleman then said " I am the Marine Superintendent of the Australian National Line in the Newcastle area and I have some clocks for repair on the MV "River Murray" can you go down the the vessel at Lee Wharf and pick them up". A very long story follows that decision resulting in the fact that R.F.Whitten not only became the clock repairer and supplier to the ANL, but to The NSW State Dockyard B.H.P. Shipping, Whyalla Shipyard, Bundaberg Shipbuilding, Cockatoo Docks, Mount Stromlo Observatory, The Australian Antarctic Research Expeditions, The Ord River Project, The Australian Lighthouse Service, The Bureau of Mineral Resources, The Royal Australian Navy, Royal Australian Air Force and has equipped 98% of all ships built in Australia since 1956 as well as all ships built by Carrington Slipways since it commenced business.

R.F.Whitten is probably the most travelled watch & clock repairer in Australia and has made urgent flights to Brisbane, Melbourne, Gladstone, Fremantle, Sydney, Adelaide and Whyalla on many occasions to carry out urgent repairs to enable ships to put to sea on schedule, and on three occasions signed on as supernumary electrician to do repairs while the ships were at sea to forestal the possibility of crew strikes because of problems with either clocks or chronometers.

In 1960 R.F.Whitten was the first Australian repairer to travel overseas to study Electric watches when he spend some time at the Hamilton Watch Factory in Lancaster Pennsylvania then went on to England to study marine chronometer repair with Thomas Mercer Ltd., St.Albans. Since that first overseas trip there have been another 18 overseas trips including a Winston Churchill Fellowship for six months study in U.S., England ,Switzerland, Germany & Japan in which was included working at the U.S.Naval Observatory - Washington D.C., Bulova School of Watchmaking (Guest lecturer on chronographs) at Woodside New York, Bulova Watch Factory at Jackson Heights NY, Royal Greenwich Observatory - Herstmonceux, National Physical Laboratories - Teddington, Neuchatel Observatory, Horological Laboratory-Neuchatel, Ebauches Department Oscilloquartz also at Neuchatel.

Some of the factories visited and studied in include; Girard-Perregaux, International - Schaffhausen, Rolex, Zenith, Ulysse-Nardin, Patek Philippe, Sarcar, Piaget, Baume & Mercier, Omega, Minerva, Mido, Jaguar Watch, Consul, Hanowa, Bucherer, Gubelin, Armin Kurz, Bulova, Brietling, Ebauches S.A. Marin, Chopard, Gerald Genta, Itraco, Blancpain... all in Switzerland, Seiko and Citizen-Japan.

The General manager of Patek Philippe has stated "I consider you (R.F.Whitten) to be the most experienced watch repairer in the world"----

This all makes one feel very proud.

