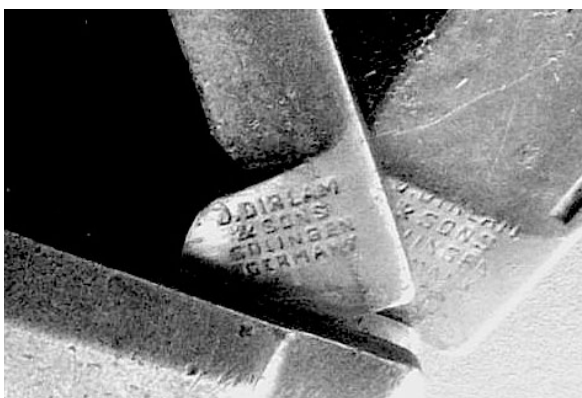


WHUT IZZIT?

by Bernard Levine
www.knife-expert.com

Mr. Jesse A. sent in pictures of two knives, one that his father was given by his grandfather, the other that he had found on eBay. Both of them are jack knives that you or I would call Barlow knives... or if we wanted to get picky, *Southern* Barlow knives, because of their curved handle and distinctive faceted bolsters, a style favored in the southern United States in the early years of the 20th century. Yet both of these knives are boldly stamped out on their clip master blades, "BUNNY" KNIFE.

The "BUNNY" KNIFE that he inherited has black handles, either wood or composition (or possibly one of each). His metric ruler, which is marked MADE IN AUSTRALIA, indicates it is a bit under 9 centimeters long closed (about 3-1/2 inches).



Both blades are tang stamped J.DIRLAM/ & SONS/ SOLINGEN/ GERMANY. All metal parts are steel.

The eBay knife is the same style of barlow, with the same "BUNNY" KNIFE marking on the blade, but with smooth bone handles. The pen blade has the same tang stamp, but the master blade's stamp is different: a logo that looks like a shirt stud (or maybe a burnisher, or even a seal), marked J.D/ S.

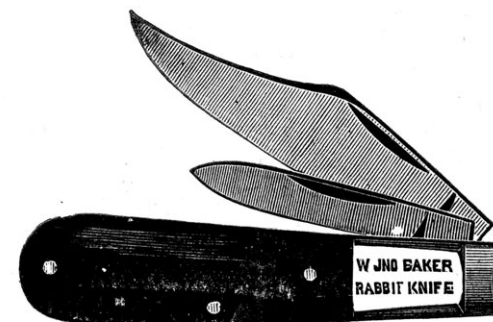


So what's up with "BUNNY" KNIFE? The Australian ruler tickled my recollection. I have seen this pattern before, associated with bunnies. I asked Mr. A. if he lives in Australia. He does.

I have an August 1924 mail order catalog from a prominent Australian retail importer of cutlery, W. Jno. Baker, 3 Hunter Street, Sydney. Most of Baker's private brand knives were made in Sheffield. Many of those were Sheffield "town patterns," made for sale both locally and worldwide. Others were distinctive-

ly Australian patterns, made (or at least marked) specifically for the Australian market.

Among these local patterns is the number "710 - 2-BLADE RABBIT KNIFE, specially designed for Rabbit Trappers; Strong Skinning and Pen Blades. Smooth Horn 3-1/4 in. Haft. 5/- each, post free." That's 5 shillings each, including shipping.



710—2-BLADE RABBIT KNIFE, specially designed for Rabbit Trappers; Strong Skinning and Pen Blades, Smooth Horn 3¼ in. Haft. 5/- each, post free.

Rabbits have loomed large in Australian history. For details see the "Rabbits in Australia" entry in Wikipedia; also the movie "The Rabbit Proof Fence" (which is only incidentally about rabbits).

Rabbits were introduced from England for food, and later for sport. They soon became a major pest, destroying vegetation, even entire landscapes, which collapsed from all the burrows. Rabbits were hunted, poisoned, and trapped. Nearby is a photo of a wagon load of rabbit skins taken by trapper Bert Mann in Walcha, New South Wales, circa 1905.



More recently rabbits and their warrens were destroyed in sheep pastures by dragging a tractor-drawn "ripper" back and forth over the ground.



That is the background of the Australian Rabbit Knife or Bunny Knife. What about J.

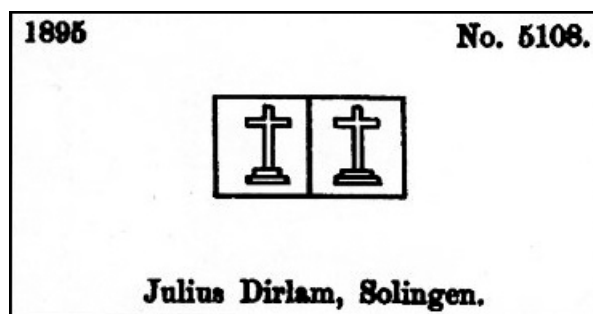
Dirlam & Son, maker of the two knives above?

Anthony Carter's book *German Sword and Knife Makers, 1850-2000*, includes a brief history of this firm. Julius Dirlam established his Steel Ware Factory in 1856. In 1895 he advertised his specialties as Pocket and Pen Knives.



1895 ad courtesy Mr. Henning Ritter

He registered a trademark of two crosses in 1895. In 1904 he registered his shirt stud logo.



A 1914 directory listing shows the firm as manufacturers of knives, scissors, and razors. The owners were Julius, Walter, and Paul Dirlam. Julius was not listed in 1920.

In the 1920s, J. Dirlam & Son advertised themselves as exporters of locally made cutlery and metalware: pocketknives and shears, souvenir and advertising items. Their primary market was England and the British Empire, particularly British dominions in the Southern Hemisphere. By 1922 Dirlam had opened showrooms and depots in London; in Sydney, Brisbane, and Adelaide, Australia; and in Durban and Johannesburg, South Africa. Dirlam also had a sales office in Riga, Latvia, on the Baltic Sea. Dirlam's telegraph address was AUSTRAL.

In this period, Dirlam registered new brands for its new markets. These included BALMORAL (registered 1901 -- there are half a dozen Balmorals in Australia, named after Balmoral Castle in Scotland), WARATAH (an Australian shrub), CANT B BEAT (in a large B), and WHITE PIGEON (possibly a reference to the Wanga-Wanga Pigeon of Eastern Australia, a pioneer delicacy; or perhaps to the 1819 English children's story "The White Pigeon" by Maria Edgeworth).

Mr. Donald Bull's Virtual Corkscrew Museum includes a press release datelined: "Solingen, Germany, July 11, 1913 - The cutlery manufacturing firm, J. Dirlam & Söhne has patented a knife in which a loosely fitted spring holds the [corkscrew] worm solidly in

place when it is folded out for use." Dirlam also announced that it was making advertising knives for Singer sewing machines, with metal handles embossed in different languages for different countries.

www.bullworks.net/daily/03jul11d.htm

In 1939, with British Empire export markets closing or closed, Dirlam only advertised its "promotional pocketknives renowned for their quality." Dirlam also made small numbers of Nazi dress daggers and bayonets in the 1930s. I do not know when (or if) the Dirlam factory closed.

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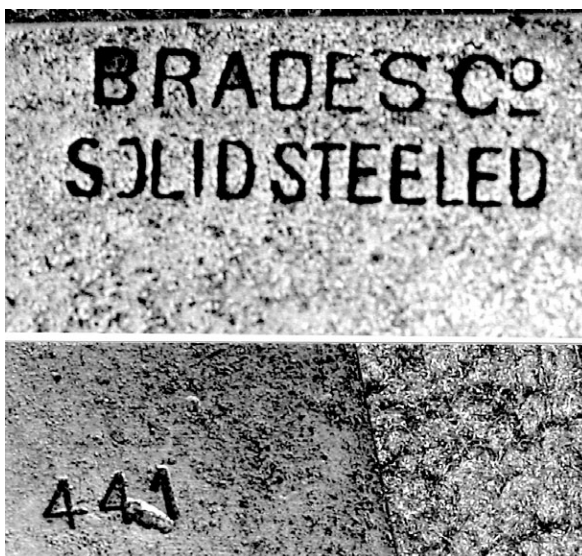
Mr. H. of Montana sent in photos and a note. He wrote, "Enclosed are photos of a bowie knife in my collection. The knife was traded to me about 1998 by [a gent] who lives near the Canadian border. He bought it about five years earlier, for \$1,200.00, from a collector about 100 miles north in Canada. I would like to know who the maker is, and the age of the knife."

I hesitate to call this item a "knife." It is certainly no antique bowie knife.

It has an original bird figural handle carved from antler -- not well carved, since the pulpy core is exposed in the middle. The material was artfully stained to look "old" and someone even added a museum-style number in ink (1-48), for "authenticity." This handle is held on by a random assortment of brass pins.

The blade is uniformly thick, and shows open grain where it has been sharpened. Alas this is not a sign of age, merely of low quality.

The markings are stamped out near the point. This is always a sign that a blade has been cut down from something larger, in this



case something much larger.

The letter style of the markings is (or should be) immediately recognizable as modern Asian gothic, a style used on export items made in Japan since the 1950s, and more recently in China. The marking says BRADES Co./ SOLID STEELED// 441. The grammatical error (steeled for steel) is typical of Japanese markings on low end hardware and cutlery.

Brades Company was a distributor of garden tools in Canada. Online I found pictures of Brades Co. billhooks, dibbers, and daisy grubbers. Some of them were marked MADE IN ENGLAND, but they looked Asian. Others lacked country of origin markings. All of them looked modern.

A modern bowie knife can be whatever one's imagination whims it to be. But antique bowie knives have nothing to do with the modern imagination. They are what they are, products of their own time, and if you want to collect them, you must trust to study of real knives, not trust to your imagination (or to Raymond Thorp's imagination, either).

To call this re-worked Brades garden tool a bowie knife is a harmless whim. To call it an antique bowie knife, and pay an antique price for it, is folly.

In this case, reading the knife, reading HOW it was marked, and reading what the markings happen to say, all confirm it is no such thing. This thing looks like no old bowie knife. The markings look like 1960s Japan. And the brand name is from modern low-end garden tools.

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Please send me an email, or mail paper correspondence to Whut Izzit, c/o *Knife World*, Box 3395, Knoxville TN 37927. Be sure to enclose either an email address, or a long self-addressed stamped envelope with your letter, and also a flatbed scan, photocopy, or photograph (on plain LIGHT GRAY or WHITE background please) of your knife. Do not write directly on the picture. Indicate the knife's handle material and its length (length CLOSED if it is a folder). Make enlarged images of all markings and indicate where they appear. Because of the large backlog, it usually takes me at least six months to answer a letter to the column.

My newest book, the updated 2nd Edition of *Knifemakers of Old San Francisco* (softcover, complete with price guide) is available direct from *Knife World* for \$29.95 plus \$5.00 postage and handling. The book is now out of print, so if you want a copy, don't wait.