



Australian Measures

*Needlework Tool Collectors Society of Australia
October, 2016*

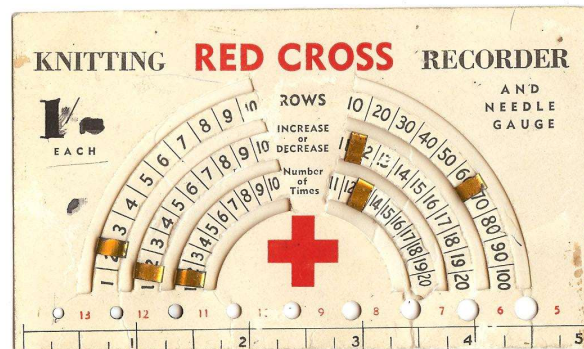
Susan Webster

- Knitter coming up to 50 years
- Always interested in history – studied at uni, etc.
- Started to combine the two in about 1990
- Collect all sorts of knitting tools, not just luxury
- More you collect, the more you want to know – this is not a well-documented field
- My special research interest is the period when knitting needles were becoming commercialized – no longer sold as a commodity by weight
- Sold under brand names.
- Have 750+ specimens of individual brand names, 950+ brand names in my database
- Divide knitting tools into several categories, which sometimes overlap
 - Needles
 - Tip guards
 - Yarn holders
 - Other – patterns, books, ephemera
 - * Needle holders
 - * Knitting sheaths and holders
 - * Measures
- Knitting and needlework related to the military and wartime is one sub-collection



- My KN reference collection about 6 years ago – now too full to take a decent photo. Always show this to demonstrate my bona fides as a knowledgeable expert on KN
- Divide my collection of needlework-related tools and items into 8 categories and several sub-collections. Measures is one.
- A lot of this talk is based on research and information from Gay Lines and Clarice Birch.
- Sheila Williams book *The History of Knitting Pin Gauges* also has a lot of information on Australian measures.
- I feel there are still a lot of Australian measures to be published. Hope anyone who has additional information now can share with me after this presentation.
- Also, if I am incorrect in anything I say, please tell me – happy to know !

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- Going to start with what I think is a unique Australian measure – based on the fact that I have never seen it overseas.
- In fact, this is the only one I have ever seen – again from South Australia, a state I feel is stuffed with needlework tool goodies – Clarice, Judith – I have envied you for years.
- Note the knitting pin diameters, as well as the foil tabs to slide along to record rows or stitches.

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- Five rectangular gauges feature two firms and an unbranded gauge that could be given away or sold by any wool shop or haberdasher.
- Knitneed - can find nothing on internet for this brand name or firm. Bought a new colour over last weekend - hooray !
- Rainsford - this firm was the Australian subsidiary, founded in the 1920's of the big UK needle firm Strattons. Book written on Rainsford - one of my first researches on the internet back in about 2004 was to locate a copy of this book in Austria, have it sent to Oz and then forward on to Sheila Williams in the UK.
- But this gauge looks very clean and new, so I am not confident of an age for it. More about Rainsford on other slides.
- Two earliest looking gauges are the unbranded examples. Note the greater transparency on the lower right unbranded gauge.
- All five of these gauges are a bit distorted (not flat), which usually indicates celluloid to me - they are here, so perhaps more knowledgeable attendees can advise me on the substance.
- Also, exhibiting this humble cardboard Wondoflex inch- and centimetre-rule. Everyone in Melbourne knows Wondoflex - with their huge store in Malvern Road, quite near where the Melb group meets each month. The store has been shrinking over the years, but their ranges of yarn and tools are still vast - staff very knowledgeable.

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- More from **Rainsford**, who seem to have rivalled Patons as producers of needlework aids as merchandising tools.
- These four gauges all have the Rainsford name around the attachment hole at the top of the bell, but all four are individuals, either by the different metal used or the wording on the gauge.
- Separate photo of the black gauge because I had to photograph it against a different background to make it show up.
- All four gauges are here today, so you can compare. I think the metals used are nickel-plate at the back of the photo of three, aluminium on the two on top, and a coated heavy metal on the black gauge in the separate photo.

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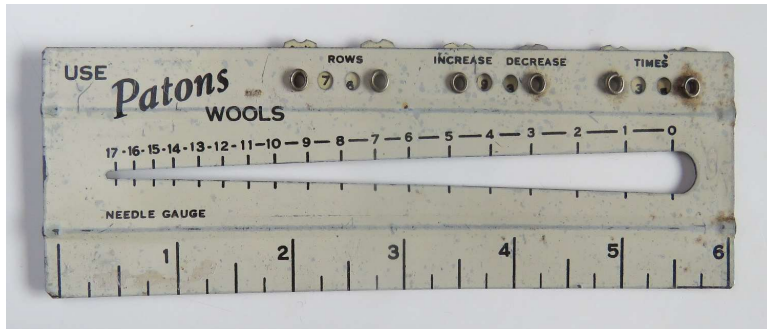
- More about Rainsford - I am the happy owner of these Lady Jayne KN - both single points and double points (only two) with their ruled shafts. They are ruled in inches.
- I date them to the 1950s or 1960s, although note the single point pair have the diameter labelled in both inches and centimetres.
- Rainsford actually manufactured a wide range of vanity products (and many others, I am sure). The Lady Jane brand is best known to collectors, I think, for economic compacts and hair accessories.
- I don't have any Lady Jane KN in plastic or wood, so I think these needles were a promotional-type item, as with the gauges.
- (Just to finish up on Rainsford, they did product the widely used Stratnoid knitting needles in Australia - I have packaging for Stratnoid needles which states "made in Australia". Stratnoid were metal needles. The brand name of Rainsford's plastic KN was Twinco.

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- Since I have just shown all those Rainsford bells, I think I should move on to their great rival for the title of biggest gauge issuer, Patons.
- Gay Lines did a huge amount of research when she and I presented on this firm's tools in 2011, so most of my information comes from here.
- After the Great Merger, as it was called in 1920 - when the two huge yarn spinners Patons of Altoa and J.J. Balwin combined - the united firm continued various of their individual trademarks and brand names.
- The Balwin Beehive shape was used with the Patons brand name, in both the UK and by the Australian subsidiary. Both Patons and Baldwins had been buying fleece direct from Australia before the merger and in about 1923, the united firm set up a spinnery in Tasmania and commercial offices first in Melbourne and then, also in Sydney.
- These plastic gauges are from separate runs in Melbourne - the only difference is the texture of the plastic and the size of the impressed words on the bottom of the gauge - larger on the right hand gauges.
- Both gauges were issued in wide ranges of colours, and re-issues also show variation in colour.

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This Patons tin gauge, coated on the front side, uses a less favoured measuring device – the only one in this collection, I think – a graduated slide.

Insert the needle near the big end of the elongated teardrop and move it towards the smaller end. When it will slide no further, read off the size.

The device also has three turning counters to keep track of rows, increases and/or decreases.

Sheila Williams says this rare gauge is very early in Australia, soon after the Great Merger. P&B tried several marketing shapes and slogans before settling on the now familiar beehive shape for gauges and needle ends. Another dead-end brand name (and produce too) was Patwin's' rug tuft cutter.

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- One other special Australian gauge was the Keepair, which was produced in a variety of finishes and the gold colour as well as the plain tin.
- Note also that there is an unbranded version of this gauge - again, this could, perhaps, have been handed out by small yarn shops ??
- Gay Lines has suggested that this gauge was the end piece of a tubular cardboard carton of knitting yarn or a tubular case for knitting needles, and Sheila Williams has taken up this hypothesis. However, I have never been able to find any written or advertising references to this, nor any examples of the cardboard tube, so I am inclined to disbelieve this.
- What I have been able to establish is that Keepair was a brand name of Coles and that it appears on “cheap-looking” knitting needles of the 1930s-1950s. As with ACI and Laminex, or with Patons and Balwin, industry consolidation resulted in a mishmash of brand names and branding. Other brand names involved here are Daintree and Target.
- Use of tin suggests a 1940s or 1930s date to me - happy to learn more if anyone has more information or suggestions.

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Garnite

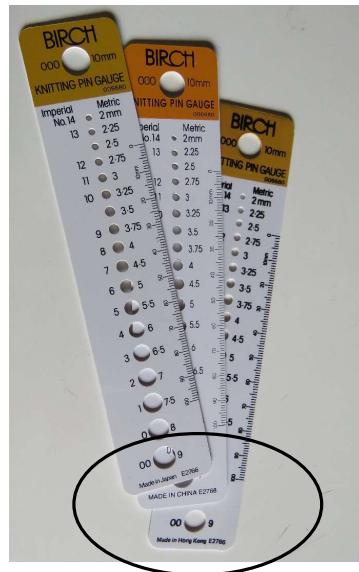
- These beautiful gauges are quite hard to find. Although I believe they were manufactured in Victoria, they seem to be easier to find in South Australia. I did have a SA Ebay seller once send me one unprotected in a standard envelope. The gauge arrived in many pieces, so I could only assume it had rested beneath the franking machine when the fatal stamp was applied.
- Museum Victoria's website has an article on the well-known firm Laminex - <http://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/articles/2633> - which says "During the 1960s the company <Laminex> also produced 'Garnite' polythene pipes and a wide range of laminate plastics and adhesives."
- I have included full page ad in Aust Women's Weekly, 1956. Also many Garnite branded items available on Gumtree and Ebay - bowls and other moulded plastics.
- Sheila Williams says the Garnite brand was manufactured by ACI - Australian Consolidated Industries - didn't pursue this apparent contradiction, but probably during industry amalgamations all the these firms came together.

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- These two knitting pin gauges show both metric and imperial sizing on the front side and rules of both metric and inches on the reverse, so post 1960. In fact, I think these gauges are closer to contemporary. The plastic packaging bears the names of two of the most long-lasting names in Melbourne haberdashery - Birch and Sullivan.
- Note from the enlargements Birch's proud boast "A Family Owned Australian Company." In fact, both of these firms are still trading and have overseas subsidiaries. Fantastic !
- But note also, that both of these measures were actually made in India.
- I'll just note that both firms also sell knitting needles now under their brand names

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Finally, contemporary gauges - I've been using a version of this gauge for at least 20 years - here are three Birch, identical except for the country of manufacture.

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- Durabel, the older guise, if we judge by the packaging, is now a trade name used by the German firm Impexron. The name was still being used for Australian manufacturing operations as late as 1976, based on classified advertising in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.
- The banjo-shaped gauge on both cards is exactly the same except for the product name and the bell on the Durabel gauge. Again we have the gauge for sizing knitting needles and inch-rule, with the nifty slide to help with the measurement. But the cards are different.
- The Sterling name already does appear on the Durabel Products card. In the star-spangled card, Sterling name is the most prominent branding, but in fact, two other firms are named in full –

American Gadgets (Aust) Pty Ltd

J.S. Robertson (Aust) Pty Ltd

- Another case of hard-to-untangle overlapping firms - several websites today offering various products

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Knitting needle holders with size measures.

I have about 30 of these type of KN holders – not very appealing, but duty calls. I used to house them empty in a closet. Complaining to myself at the amount of room they occupied, I realised I could use them to protect my alphabetical collection. So now all 30 reside on my shelves, some with lots of needles and others with only a few – depending on length of needles. my collection

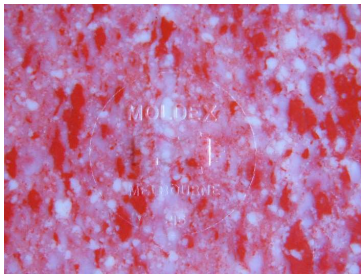
These type of KN holders were very popular in the UK too, all dating from the, perhaps, 1950s except the blue Birch at the top, which was still retailed very recently. More Birch :

The first five cases on the table all come from Consolidated Plastics Industries (again, ACI), despite the different finish on the first two Hoadley's boxes.

The sixth, mottled pink, case – the most attractive to my eye – seems quite rare. Its hard-to-read brand name is Moldex.

The moulded seventh, top blue case is, again, good old Birch.

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Here are the makers of the KN holders, all from Melbourne.

Mottled pink – Moldex

Dark blue – Peter Fanning & Co

Light blue – Continental Plastics