

# WINTERBOTTOM BONE Knife Handles

By David Clark

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**Large folding hunters: Top knife is a Queen City with early Winterbottom bone handles, circa 1936. The bottom knife is a Queen Cutlery with Winterbottom bone handles, circa 1954**

## **What is Winterbottom Bone?**

To the person that is not a collector or enthusiast of antique cutlery, the words “Winterbottom bone” must seem a strange pairing of these words. However, to those who love the old cutlery, those two words are very familiar and bring an instant picture to mind of distinctive and unique liner grooved and stained bone handled knives. The very distinctive visual character of Winterbottom bone was used for knife handles of some by America’s oldest cutleries; it was a bone handle material for pocket, hunting and table cutlery during the first half of the last century. Queen Cutlery of Titusville, Pennsylvania was the principal user of Winterbottom bone handle material, but it is also known that Case, Imperial, Camillus, Cattaraugus, Ka-Bar and others also produced some knives with Winterbottom Bone handles.

## Who developed it?

The Winterbottom bone's distinctive jigging and coloring was developed by Samuel Winterbottom of Egg Harbor, NJ. In the 1924 book, *"South Jersey, a History 1864 – 1924,"* Samuel is described as *"Possessing artistic taste, as well as the skill of a fine artisan."* Samuel was a bone cutter by training and profession. He immigrated to America in 1885. This same book offers more of his personal history:

*John Winterbottom, Mr. Winterbottom's father, was born and died in Sheffield, England, and was a bone-cutter by occupation, his trade linking his name with the world famous cutlery manufacturers of that city. The family has followed similar lines of activities in England one hundred and thirty years. ...*

*Samuel Winterbottom was born in 1857 in Sheffield, England, and in early life became employed as a bone cutter and manufacturer of handles of all kinds for knives, in association with his father. Then coming to America, he located in Philadelphia, where he was employed for a year and a half by Joseph Hayes, a manufacturer of parchment paper. Mr. Winterbottom acted as a buyer of rags and other materials which go into the manufacture of this fine quality of paper. Next going to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, Mr. Winterbottom took charge of the Hayes Mill for eight months, then came to Egg Harbor City, where he became identified with Jacob Eiselstein in the manufacture of paper. After about a year and a half Mr. Winterbottom established his own business in 1891, securing a desirable location between Norfolk and New York avenues. One year later, however, he was able to better himself in the matter of location and removed to South Liverpool Avenue, at its junction with the Reading Railroad. Starting with one employee, Mr. Winterbottom was able to employ four men when he entered his new quarters and before the close of the year added a small wing to the building. He developed the business constantly until now he has a fine two story building, 200 x 150 in ground dimensions, and employs about 100 people. The line of manufacture includes many kinds of novelties in the way of amber and tortoise shell handle for pocket knives, manicure sets and so forth, special handles for table cutlery and various novelties in this general group."*



**Samuel Winterbottom circa 1922**

“The Daily Union History of Atlantic City and County, New Jersey,” published in 1900, noted that in 1899 “Winterbottom, Carter & Co. in South Egg Harbor employ about twenty-five hands in the manufacture of bone handles for knives.” At the beginning of WWI in 1914, “The Industrial Directory of New Jersey” noted that Winterbottom, Carter & Co. had 58 employees and in 1918 at the end of WWI they employed 85 persons. Samuel was the factory superintendent while Carter handled the office and booking keeping duties. During the war the factory was supplying handle material for knives and bayonets and Carter, being a Quaker and a pacifist, objected and resigned from the company. Carter retained his share of ownership of the company until 1919 when his interest was purchased by Winterbottom for \$9,000.

Samuel and Martha had four sons, Harry, John, Ernest, and Fredrick, all of whom worked in the Company. At some point the company name was changed to Samuel Winterbottom Sons.



Winterbottom, Carter & Company located Liverpool and the Reading railroad Egg Harbor City, New Jersey circa 1895. Samuel Winterbottom is the person in the white apron 3rd from the right.



Winterbottom, Carter & Company located Liverpool and the Reading railroad Egg, Harbor City, New Jersey circa 1900. Samuel Winterbottom is the person in the white apron standing in front of the doorway, his son Ernest to his left. Carter is the second person from the left standing on the ground.

Photograph courtesy of Egg Harbor City Historical Society.





Winterbottom, Carter & Co. employees in front of a railcar loaded with bone. Samuel Winterbottom, with an apron, is in the front row, third from the left, C. 1900.



The Winterbottom Carter & Co. Bone Factory in Egg Harbor, NJ. 1914. Photograph courtesy of Egg Harbor City Historical Society.



The Winterbottom Carter & Co. Bone Factory in Egg Harbor, NJ. c.1925. Photograph courtesy of Egg Harbor City Historical Society.

## Queen City Cutlery Company

It was noted earlier that Queen City Cutlery, and later Queen Cutlery were the primary users of Winterbottom bone as a handle material. Some recently discovered business records of Queen City Cutlery indicate that Queen City placed its first order with Samuel Winterbottom Sons in 1930. They continued to increase their purchase until it peaked in 1936 and then decreased through the last years of the Great Depression until the start of WWII. Most knife collectors call the bone on the Queen City knives shown in the following photographs “early Winterbottom bone”.



Queen City folding knives with early Winterbottom bone from the 1930s

### **Queen Cutlery Company**

Following the end of World War II, Queen City changed its name to Queen Cutlery Co. They registered the Big “Q” trademark in 1946 and in 1947 published their first catalog after the war. Queen Cutlery began using a new designed Winterbottom bone jigging on four of their hunting knife patterns that appeared in this catalog. They named this Winterbottom bone “Genuine Frontier bone stag” in the catalog. Queen transitioned from Rogers bone to Winterbottom bone over the next few years as their primary bone scale. By 1954, most bone handled knives, with the exception of most Barlow patterns, were produced in Winterbottom bone. Queen had been using Rogers bone from Rogers Mfg. Co. as a handle material since the 1920s, but must have decided to transition to Winterbottom bone after the war. They were the principle users of Winterbottom bone during this time from 1947 until the late 1960s. Fred Sampson, who was the materials manager at Queen during this time, told me that on many occasions Queen purchased that bone directly from Brazil and had it shipped to the Samuel Winterbottom Sons Company for cutting, jigging and staining. Queen continued to use Winterbottom bone until the late 1960s.

In the early 1960s, the increased demand for bone dust from other industries forced the price of bone product higher which in turn caused an increased cost for Winterbottom bone handles and thus a cost impact on cutlery. In the late 1960s there were government restrictions on imported bone and embargos on foreign wood. Other cutlery manufactures were also transitioning from bone to synthetic materials for knife handles. These events made Winterbottom bone manufactured products so expensive that the company sold out to one of their customers in 1968. Queen Cutlery sought new material to replace the genuine bone handle material.



Sampson remembers that about this same time, Queen sent some of the Winterbottom bone handles to Rogers Mfg. Co. who made molds of these real bone scales and began producing synthetic handles now known by collectors as “imitation Winterbottom bone”. Bernard Levine, in a 1990 *Knife World* magazine article noted: “In the 1950s, cost-conscious cutlery manufacturers began to discontinue the production of bone handled pocketknives. Rogers Mfg. Co. changed with the changing times, and began to offer synthetic pocketknife handles. Mr. Bitel, who started with Rogers in 1955, was involved in the transition. He states that Rogers Mfg. Co. was the first firm to produce pocketknife scales made out of Delrin (a DuPont acetal resin).” Queen’s transition from genuine bone to Delrin marked the end of the use of genuine Winterbottom bone as a standard handle material in the late 1960s.

The distinctive jigging patterns and colorings of the original Winterbottom bone has maintained much of its character as it transitioned into Delrin; and “Winterbottom” became a generic name that is still used in the cutlery industry today. Currently Queen produces a line of pocket cutlery using Delrin Winterbottom handles; special factory order of bone handled knives with Winterbottom jigging for Frank’s Classic Knives known as “Queen Classics”; and in 1993 Queen used genuine bone with a Winterbottom jigging for its third Schatt & Morgan series knives. In addition, Winterbottom is the name of one of Case Cutlery’s jigging patterns and this year they offer eight knife patterns in Sunset Bone color.

Winterbottom bone inspired patterned knife handles live on today taking their heritage from the originals of the 1930s, 40s and 50s. It is hard to believe, but genuine Winterbottom bone handled knives from the 1950s, in mint condition, can easily be found at knife shows and on the internet with prices often equal to or less than many of the new American made bone handled knives.



Queen Cutlery’s “Genuine Frontier bone stag,” Winterbottom bone from the late 1940s to late 1960s





Queen Cutlery's "Genuine Frontier bone stag," Winterbottom bone from the late 1940s to late 1960s



Queen Cutlery's "Genuine Frontier bone stag," Winterbottom bone from the late 1940s to late 1960s



Queen Cutlery's burnt orange imitation Winterbottom bone (Delrin) from the Roger's Mfg. Company used in the 1960s and 1970s.



Queen Cutlery's imitation Winterbottom bone (Delrin) from the Roger's Mfg. Company used in the 1960s and 1970s.

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