

Pioneer fishing rod maker

LEN BUTTERWORTH

Angler, fishing rod manufacturer
 Born: Brisbane, February 2, 1915
 Died: Gold Coast, April 17, 2009

LEN Butterworth was a true pioneer of Australian commercial fishing-rod building. He will be remembered for his Powerrod fishing rods and his Pastime fishing reels. He mastered the art of building a well-balanced fishing rod that was strong but light, easy to grip and easy to handle.

Leonard Charles Buterworth's passion for fishing started when he was a student at Buranda State School and a member of the fishing club.

Buranda State School deputy headmaster Bert Merrill, who was involved with the Amateur Fishing Association, first introduced him to fishing.

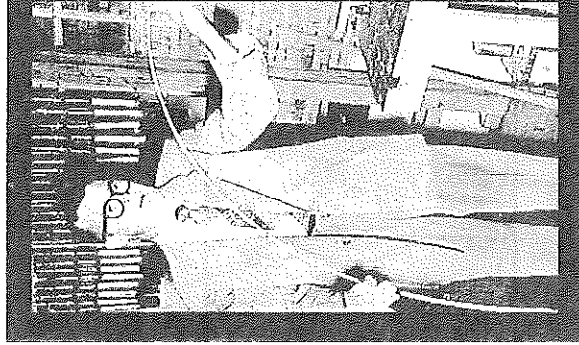
Mr Merrill formed the first boys' fishing club, which consisted of boys from the Buranda Scholarship class, of which Mr Butterworth was the youngest member.

They went on the launch Koopa to the Doug Ogilvy Hut on Bribie Island, which started Mr Buterworth's long association with Bribie.

He left school at the age of 13 and caddied for two years with Mick Stafford at Brisbane Golf Club.

He then secured a job at Hamilton's Tent Makers where he learnt to splice and bind, which led him into repairing fishing rods as a hobby for members of the McWhirter's Fishing Club.

He stayed at Hamilton's until he



KING of the catch... Len Butterworth, above, and with one of his early rods.

was 19, later moving to Pickers Tent Makers. It was then that he started to make fishing rods in a shed at his family home in Stones Corner.

George Pickers rented him a room at £6 a week, underneath Pickers in Cremorne Lane, South Brisbane, where he turned the wood butts (fishing rod handles) with Henry Smith.

The wood lathe and bandsaw were set up along a wall of the room which overlooked the rehearsal stage of the Cremorne Theatre.

To get timber to turn the butts, the two offered to trim camphor laurel

trees in local back yards. It was with this in mind that his daughters thought it fitting to choose camphor laurel for his coffin.

The first rods made were two-piece seven-footers (2.1m) and Mr Butterworth sold them for 7s 6d each.

The rods were made from English lancewood and saffron heart and later split cane.

After marrying Olive Downs in 1940, they moved into a home in Cavendish Rd, Coorparoo, where Mr Butterworth had a shed built in the backyard and moved production.

To deliver his rods, he used to walk to the tram stop — quite a distance from his home — then travel to the city, dispense his goods and catch the tram back home. All the tram drivers came to know him.

As the business expanded, Mr Butterworth bought a building in Stanley St and was there for many years before fire destroyed the factory.

Much of the stock was stored in an additional warehouse above Pelican Ink in the city. About three weeks after the Stanley St fire, a second fire burned through the Pelican Ink factory and the rest of the stock was destroyed.

The Stanley St factory was rebuilt and several years later, an officer from an American ship met Mr Butterworth and told him that his father owned a fishing tackle store in Phoenix and that fibreglass rods were taking over.

Mr Butterworth paid for George Martinek and his family to move from the US to Australia to help set up a fibreglass plant in the Stanley St factory. It was the first plant in Australia to extrude solid glass.

One of Mr Butterworth's staff, Mick Innes, made a tapering machine for the solid glass.

After a heart scare, when his four daughters were still at school, he sold out to Queensland United Foods.

He stayed on to manage the factory and, on one of his trips to the American Fishing Tackle Manufacturers Association show in the US, he met Dick Snyder, a US expert on tubular glass.

A year later, Mr Snyder had set up a

plant in the factory, which had moved to Coopers Plains. Mr Snyder made all the equipment and it was the first successful tubular glass plant in Australia.

Mr Butterworth retired from QUF and established his own factory in Carole Park with his daughter, Ann and her husband, and Mr Snyder.

His Australian Tackle Sales (Snyder/Glas) made the first graphite-composite surf rod in Australia.

Mr Butterworth loved Bribie Island and bought his first house there in the 1940s. He went fishing wherever he could and had a couple of favourite spots, one near Cape Moreton, where he caught big snapper and pearl perch.

Mr Butterworth retired to Bribie in 1992 but because of his wife's ill health he moved to the Gold Coast in 1997.

He was a keen lawn bowler and won many championships including the Metropolitan Pairs in 1970.

He was president of Tattersall's Bowling Club for some years and was a life member of Tattersall's Club.

When he moved to the Gold Coast, he played social bowls at Paradise Point Bowls Club and when his eyesight started to fail, he would watch many games from the sidelines.

He is survived by four daughters, seven grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.

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