

I recall during the early 1970s being present at an address given by Mr Charles Richter (dec) the Stanley Tools first Export Manager from Connecticut USA telling of his adventures pre WWII travelling throughout Asia and other remote locations establishing sales and distribution channels. He was travelling by any means possible sometimes rail, canoe and by foot with a catalogue and sample kit not unlike the J Rabone representative. I was able to produce an early videotape of this unusual presentation and it now resides in The Stanley Works historical archives USA.



*Rabone Salesman's Carry Case (Frank Ham Collection)*



*A modern selling kit in a Carry Case – Stanley Proto Tools*

How did the process of samples come about?

Early tool development was basic and each tool purpose built to satisfy an immediate need for the user. If it was successful it was seen by others or passed by word of mouth, and soon the item was being requested and made in quantity. The maker would often be seen taking his goods by horse and wagon direct to the farm gate in order to gain a sale. Direct correspondence played a major role in gaining orders.

Written advertisements were used in newspapers and posters often with outrageous claims relating to their product encouraged sales.

With the industrial revolution came mass production and to keep the equipment or manufacturing centre viable sales needed to be regular, hence the “Travelling Salesman” came into the scene first appearing in Australia in the 1860s when railway expansion gave opportunities for country towns to grow and develop.

He was most times away from home all week or more, a man approaching middle age with top hat or bowler, waistcoat in vivid scarlet or green colour, a massive watch chain around his stomach and a pocket watch. With umbrella or walking stick and side whiskers, beard or large moustache he would appear with a large case full of samples ready to “Woo the customer” and gain a company sale.

The salesman would not only carry samples of the item to display, but also have catalogue and brochure on hand, sometimes leaving an example behind to sell for its self.

Next came the storekeeper who was a wholesaler or retailer of goods and this required store displays, working models etc which were provided by the company so that their item became interesting to their target market.