



web spiders. One bite can easily kill you.

“One day we dug three beautiful Lamont bottles and 12 to 15 deadly funnel webs,” Bell said. Happily, “they are obvious as when you uncover one, it immediately rears back ready to strike. We are rather casual with them as they are so common.”

No shotgun needed here. Just a whack with the spade or a heavy foot.

Bell, 70, once spent a winter in Australia and was pleasantly surprised by the absence of snow which was always plentiful in his hometown of Chicago during that season. So he moved to the island nation in the early 1960s.

He has been involved in the antique bottle collecting hobby for 48 years. His first hobby was coin collecting. He said an uncle was responsible “for my starting the (collecting) disease at age 10.” His other collectibles include postage stamps, Australian banknotes and Australian paintings.

He said his favorite thing about being involved in bottle collecting “is the people and not the bottles. I love ‘em because you can hear lots of stories.”

One of his favorite stories concerns “a guy who had three dogs. So he built a metal cage with a dirt floor and one of the first things the dogs did was to dig. And they dug up some very good bottles!”

Landfills in Australia (and the U.K.) are called “tips” and one of 10 acres and 25 feet in depth in the huge mining area called Broken Hill was targeted by Bell and others. It is located in “the far west of outback New South Wales near the border with South Australia. It was established in 1883,” according to Wikipedia, “and is among the world’s largest silver-lead-zinc mineral deposits.”

Mine management charged each collector \$25 a year for the privilege of digging for their brands of buried treasure. Among the finds, Bell said, were 15,000 Maugham’s rolling pin bottles used in the soft drink industry.

Australia became a penal colony in the early 19th century and some of its inmates volunteered when there was a call for potters. Utilitarian pottery was rare until certain convicts came along. “Many had few skills, but volunteered to get away from the other hard work,” Bell said.

So like South Carolina’s slave potters, in Australia there became a number of skilled captive workers in clay who turned out what is loosely called “Convict-Made” gray clay salt-glazed containers utilized by early settlers and their families. They also are much prized by today’s collectors.

“Some are even stamped with the makers’ names, including Jonathan Leak and John Moreton, and dated 1819,” Bell said.. There is a rare beer made in Adelaide and valued at \$8,000, “but for some reason is found only in Darwin. Another prize is the slab seal clay Lion Brewery.”



THE MAN FROM DOWN UNDER

By Bill Baab

It’s amazing the facts that float to the top during an interview with a bottle collector from Down Under, a.k.a. New South Wales, Australia, during the Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors 50th Anniversary National Show and Convention in Augusta, Georgia last August.

Most American bottle diggers carry a probe, a pitchfork, a spade and a trowel, but conditions in his adopted country of residence cause **James F. Bell** to include some firepower in the form of a 16-gauge shotgun to accompany his shovel and pick.

No, it is not used to warn away other diggers from his area of bottle discoveries. When he is deep in a hole in pursuit of antique bottles, he may find himself in the presence of a deadly tiger snake, hissing angry at being disturbed by the destruction of its habitat among the rubbish. Enter the shotgun. Exit the snake.

Not only does he and fellow diggers have to be concerned by poisonous serpents. There also are spiders, specifically “funnel