

**Interview at Woods and Porter in Dartford on
Tuesday, 21st September 2010**

Myself: Could you please tell me the history of Woods & Porter?

Roger Woods: It was started in 1946 by my father Burt, Burt Woods and his partner Jerry Porter. They had both worked at Vickers during the war and with the money they had managed to accumulate with their overtime they started this business. They had both been keen amateur photographers.

Myself: Were you a keen amateur photographer yourself?

Roger Woods: Well I had been brought up with it, you know? Cameras and things were always something that was around the home. So it seemed like an easy thing to drop into once I had left school. Well I worked somewhere else for a year and then I came here. That would have been in 1970. So I've been here in this store for forty years.

Jerry Porter and my father split up in 1964.

Myself: Oh ok, was it an amicable split?

Roger Woods: Well, they just had a disagreement with how the business should be run. Jerry wanted to continue doing industrial photography, which he enjoyed. My father was quite into electronics and he wanted to start selling hi-fi equipment which was quite a growing business in the sixties. Jerry Porter started a new company in Erith called Phototex and carried on doing industrial photography and commercial work. He didn't carry on weddings. In 1964 is when we stopped taking wedding photographs as a company. The company sort of split, hi-fis were sold upstairs and the photography was done downstairs. I returned it to 100% photographic in 1978 or 1979 and we stopped doing hi-fi. The market was changing and people were buying music centres as opposed to separates.

Myself: Have you enjoyed running the shop?

Roger Woods: Yeah it's been a bit of fun, over the years it's been good yeah.

Myself: Do you believe that digital has had a strong effect on the sales of film cameras?

Roger Woods: Yeah, digital has changed photography entirely. Yeah, it's a completely different business now.

Myself: What would you say is one of the rarest camera to come through here? Like, for instance, you were astonished that they were giving away.

Roger Woods: Oh, my memory is not what it was, yeah, I suppose the rarest thing to turn up was a [Zeiss Super Nettel](#).

Myself: Oh ok, and how rare and valuable would one of those be?

Roger Woods: I suppose at the time it would have fetched around £400-£500. It certainly wasn't the best thing that Zeiss have ever made. It was a sort of a budget version of the Contax with a non-

interchangeable lens rangefinder. It was a folding camera, so it was fiendishly complicated and it was not much cheaper than the interchangeable lens Contax cameras. So they didn't sell many of them and that's why it was rare. Not because it was a good camera but because it was an odd camera.

Myself: So, what do you see as the future of film photography, because you have things like Lomography for instance?

Roger Woods: I really don't get what Lomography are trying to achieve. It mystifies me as to what the attraction is. Perhaps you could tell me, what is it about it [Lomography]?

Myself: From my point of view, because I am a photographer and I know how to read light and I know the technical side of photography I guess that Lomography cameras can sort of free you from that and you can get a rich variety of results

Roger Woods: I just think that that will be a passing fad, I really do. It might be for a few years, but I think the novelty will soon wear off. There are so many un-sharp and underexposed shots you can live with. It's not what photography is about at all. It's a novel idea that somebody has come up with.

Myself: It's kind of resurged sales of film and so forth

Roger Woods: To a small extent, but as far as a mass market goes. If it going to be a small volume it's going to get increasingly specialised and increasingly more expensive to get processed.

Myself: My friend and I once compared film photography to how Vinyl has become in the music environment.

Roger Woods: It will never disappear completely I don't think. Same as there are still people taking using 10x8" glass plates or film as it has to be these days and the results are amazing. As soon as the volume drops below a certain point big companies like Kodak and Fuji just aren't going to be interested. It's going to be small companies and hard to get a hold of. It will probably never disappear completely. Well, not in our lifetimes.

Myself: Hopefully not.

Myself: Because you have had a lot of customers come in and out of the store in the past 40 years what one piece of advice would you give? Say for instance something that people kept forgetting.

Roger Woods: Well it's hard to think of one piece but one thing that comes to mind is that people don't tend to get in close enough. Whatever it is they're too far from it 9 times out of 10. When you look through a viewfinder and compose the image in the frame they don't seem to realise that there is a lot in the picture that they don't necessarily want. People never seem to crop properly and they're always too far away. Not always, but your general snapshotter never gets in close enough. I suppose with digital it's not quite as critical because you can always crop it after the shot which wasn't so easy to do if you were just sending your shots off to a lab to get their film processed. And the rule of third, always bear it in mind. A lot of people don't know about it but it's a good rule of thumb.

Myself: Any memorable customers throughout the years?

Roger Woods: Oh, far too many, I remember that some people read things in the press and not realise that they were a spoof. I once had a guy come in who swore blind that you could get a

camera that could take a photograph through a wall. All the persuasion in the world, he wouldn't believe that these things were not in production. Another spoof that happened was with Amateur Photographer [the magazine] for April Fools saying the Cokin had produced a filter that could see through clothing. So you got all kind of dirty men coming in trying to get this filter that they had read about and all the while I thinking "What is going on?" as I hadn't read that weeks copy of the magazine so I hadn't seen the article. The Cokin See Through Clothing Filter.

Myself: What would you class as your favourite camera? Like for instance if one came in you wouldn't want to sell and you would want to keep for yourself? [18:52]

Roger Woods: Favourite film camera? You know I've never even thought about that over the years. I suppose of and on I've tried most of them. I know it sounds crazy, I probably haven't got a favourite.

Myself: Well do you have a favourite type at all? SLR, Rangefinder etc?

Roger Woods: Well its horses for courses really I mean they all have their uses. I suppose if I had to have just one camera it would have to be an SLR just for the versatility. I suppose rangefinders are useful as well. I suppose the one camera I wouldn't sell if it came in would be the camera that I had as my first SLR camera. Which by assumption I probably sold as I was working in the shop. As I moved onto more modern things. It was a high quality Italian camera known as a [Rectaflex](#) made in the 1950's. Quite expensive so they sort of died a death I suppose. But I think we just happened to have a second-hand one in which we had used professionally and had been semi-retired as it had got on a bit. I regretted selling it after I sold it unfortunately.

At this point in the interview we had to take a short break as a customer came in wanting passport photographs for their child. This isn't the first time we had a break directly before the question on the future of film photography two customers came into the store, one right after the other. And both asked whether Roger provided the service of converting tape to DVD. Which it turns out he did not, but, was more than happy to provide the phone number of a man in Dartford who provided the service. The store was fully functioning and I believe it was all the way to the last day. Which if you are reading this in the day the blog post was put u would be today.

Myself: Last question, as I only thought these up about two hours ago. Where would you say would be somewhere close by to buy cameras from. Because you said that you and Rochester Cameras were also closing.

Roger Woods: I would say that Percivals in Eltham but I have always found them to be a bit on the expensive side.

Myself: Can you give an example?

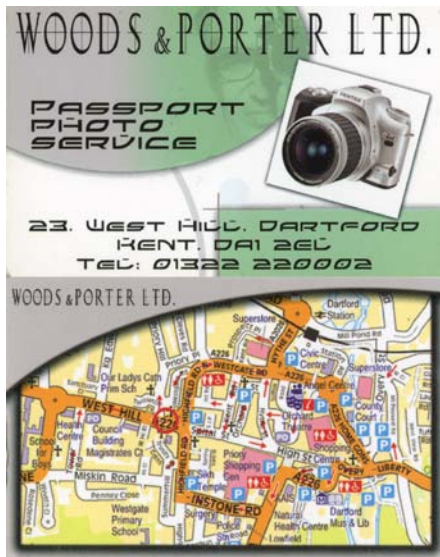
Roger Woods: I had a customer last week come in for an Olympus OM body. I had a second hand OM for £30 but he had bought a second hand one for £90 there. I think they try it on a bit with their customers. But it's up to them, if they feel they can get it. I don't believe in ripping people off.

Myself: That's good to hear

Roger Woods: Well, If you've got a good reputation. It takes may years to get it, why risk it by doing

things like that.

Myself: Well, thank you for letting me interview you and I've had a lot of fun coming here over the years. Can I buy some film?



Front and rear of a Woods & Porter business card.