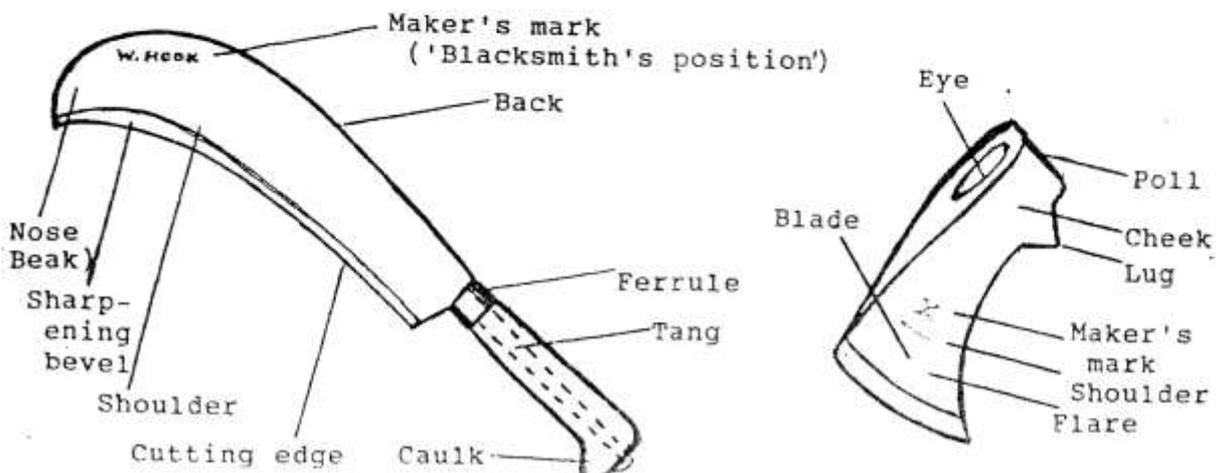


BLACKSMITH-MADE EDGE-TOOLS - A FORGOTTEN INDUSTRY

Since billhooks and axes, and side-axes, were the tools of the village-based hedger and coppice-craftsman, and since they knew where their local edge-tool-making forge was situated - a walk away - there was no overview at any time in the Industry's long life of how many such forges there were. Without written records, a fairer title would be "The Unknown Industry".

Were research to have been undertaken even a quarter-of-a-Century ago, it would have been possible to interview and learn much from the last of the blade-smiths: John Fenner of Boarshead - whose output appears to have been almost entirely edge-tools, and who also made tools for the hop industry - was still making at the age of 90 in 1978. Other major producers appear in the following list, with a number of known examples of their work still extant; but most appear to have been 'general smiths' who had learnt the art of tempering and produced a small number of edge-tools to serve the needs of craftsmen in their village and Parish.

From the middle of the 19th Century Kelly's produced the bulky Trades Directory, listing some 550 general smiths for West and East of the County. There was a separate heading, 'Edge Tool Makers', but it appears that the few smiths (in some years as many as four, but in most years one, or none) prepared to pay a fee for inclusion for the most part never produced an edge-tool. Tradition must have played a part here: the user would prefer to buy from a smith he knew or knew of, rather than from a 'newcomer' who might or might not produce a good blade. And the County would have long-since been cut up into the catchment areas of the existing blade-smiths. It follows that the edge-tool smiths lie hidden in the 'general smiths' list and the only practicable method of identifying them is to see their tools and identify them from their marks, a research project that can really only be conducted within the County, from where Field Trips can be mounted and regular visits made to the County Record Office at Lewes. Pre-1860 marks are usually obscure ones, consisting of the initials of the Christian name (usually one at that time), of the surname, and - if there is a third initial - of the village name). In academic circles it was believed until Spring of 1996 that village names were never marked: but those marks illustrated in this List show that such marking was the usual practice, whether in full, abbreviated or by initial. In those circles it was also believed that very few smiths had the expertise to temper. This tempering - heating to a straw colour - and then fixing the toughness of the cutting edge by quenching the tool, was an essential element in edge-tool making. And there are four instances (which suggest it was a widespread practice) of smiths who would temper out of sight even of their own apprentices; who they would no doubt regard as future competitors. The named parts of billhook and axe are :-



Before the advent of the large manufacturers in Sheffield, Birmingham, Cannock, etc., towards the middle of the 19th Century, every item of iron could only have been made by the blacksmith, and iron objects featured in everyday life, such as hinges, latches, agricultural tools and implements, horse and cart fittings. All other crafts depended upon the smith for the making of the craft tools. The status of the smith must, for that reason alone, have been higher than for other villagers; and many of them doubled as postmasters, farmers, publicans, shopkeepers, etc. The status of the edge-tool smith must have been even higher, since he possessed the tempering skill that general smiths lacked. And he could be better-off, since, when general work was slack he could make a billhook or two for later sale, yielding a higher annual income. It seems that the major producers used a template to produce a standard-shaped blade, peculiar to their forge, but in all cases conforming to the simple pattern found across Kent and Sussex. Different County and Regional patterns were found across the country, designed to meet the local needs of craftsmen. East Anglian ones tend to be socketted rather than tanged, and to have a cutting bevel only on the right of the blade, like a side-axe. Yorkshire billhooks have a smaller blade mounted on the back of the main blade; and other variations occur, which were embodied and preserved in the illustrated catalogues of the manufacturers.

Sussex and Kent appear to be the Counties where the edge-tool tradition was strongest, probably because they had always been rich in hedges (to be laid and maintained) and coppice woodland (which yielded wood for hurdles, gates, fences and the like). East Anglian landscape was very different, and with a weak smiths' industry the manufacturers easily gained a toehold. In Kent and Sussex, however, they faced an existing strong industry, and in the early years, anyway, seem only to have supplied billhooks as a general-purpose tool, not as a craftsman's tool. Only physical examination of the two types can show the advantage of the smith's one: the blade is matchstick-thin on the forward part, swelling at the point where the blade joins the tang, which lessens the risk of breakage. The blade is therefore light and can be used for long periods without tiring the user, and - however ungainly the blade appears to be, the balance is excellent.

Although the manufactured ones were cheaper to produce, costs rose dramatically when conveyed to the user. Sold through ironmongers, the user - a man whose transport was limited to Shank's Pony - would find the town where the ironmonger was, hard to reach, in terms of effort and time - and time was of the essence for these craftsmen: a day lost was a day's income lost. In any event, the main tool - the billhook - would be a major purchase, intended to last the user's lifetime, and perhaps his son's too. Also, should a latent fault appear in the blade, or - for example - the angle of tang needing adjusting; the user could walk the quite-short distance to the maker's forge and have the matter put right. Not so with the distant Ironmonger or an even-more-distant Manufacturer. A user could explain, also, his particular requirements, to the smith.

What has long been thought to be a puzzle, as to why there should have been such a wide variety of patterns, may be simply that one manufacturer visited the area and examined a range of local patterns (and he would not even have to anger a smith by visiting his forge: he could see them in use around the Parish), and a "down-the-middle" pattern would then be taken, named for a town or County and manufactured; other manufacturers copying pattern and name. What is not clear is how the tradition arose of a smith marking well-forward on the blade's back, at a time when there was no transportation for a villager. Many puzzles remain to be resolved, and room yet remains, in this research, for informed guesswork. I would like to thank the many who have made their collections available and provided a wealth of information.

(WITH SHORT LISTS FOR WEST SUSSEX & FOR KENT)

1. Marks are those found on billhooks, unless otherwise indicated by: 'A' - Axes; 'SA' - Side-axes, or 'SH' - Spar hooks.

2. Where more than a single example of a smith's work is known, the number of examples is shown in brackets.

3. The years for a smith's first and last operating are as shown in Kelly's Trades Directory: but since it was not published each year, and intermittently, the period of operation could be longer. The 'run' of Directories used is from 1862 to 1938, and where a smith is shown as operating in either of those two years, it may be that he was also working before 1862, or after 1938.

4. The further back one goes in the 19th Century, the rarer it was for a villager to have more than one Christian name. Thus a third initial will indicate the village where the forge was situated. In the below List the Christian name is shown where known, otherwise the initial. "Initial-only" marks are usually early, and if before 1862, archive research at the relevant County Record Office will be necessary.

FURTHER RESEARCH:

The great majority of the below-identified tools are the only-known example of a smith's work; from which it follows that more will 'surface' to be identified - and that more still have been lost for ever. Identification of the Who, Where & When of their making is the basis of any further research into this "Forgotten Sussex Industry".

The research would be greatly helped forward by any person having access to an unlisted edge-tool sending a tracing of the mark (together with where it 'surfaced') to:-

Tony BAYFIELD, Flat 4, 8 Grange Gardens, Grange Road, Eastbourne, BN21 4HJ. Tel: 01323 641076.

All communications will be answered.

- | | | | |
|----|----------------------|---|-----------------|
| 1. | AIRD, William Alfred | Brighton, 1899. Listed 'Edge Tool Maker'. | No tools known. |
| 2. | ALLEN, George | Ticehurst, 1862. Widow's Holding 1866-7. | G. ALLEN |
| 3. | AYRES, Gideon | Battle, 1903. Listed 'Edge Tool Maker'. | No tools known |
| 4. | BALLARD, Thomas | Wadhurst, 1862-70. | TB W |

5. BENEY, Thomas Battle, 1909-1938-
See Supplement No. 1. Right-side mark:



6. BOURNER, John Vines Cross, 1887-
1918.



Mark inverted

7. BOWLIN, Beckley,



Beckley

8. BOWLIN, Edwin Beckley, 1862.
(& Wheelwright) Widow's Holding 1866-74.
See also DUNSTER below.



Unattributable marks:



9. BOX, Francis Withyham, 1862-95.



10. BURCHETT, William Robertsbridge, 1874-8.

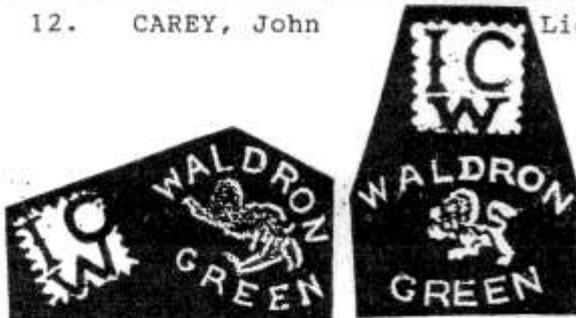


11. BUSS, Frederick William Dallington, 1930-8.

Right-side
mark.



12. CAREY, John Lion's Green, 1821-37.



Archaic "I" for "J".
Initials mark double-struck on
billhooks only (6).

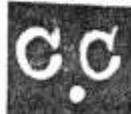
SH

A

See also later smiths - John FREELAND & Edmund SMITH - below.

13. CHRISTMAS, Charles
('CHRISTMAS' in
19th Century)

Cowbeech, 1887-1915.



SH Mark inverted

14. CORNFORD, Frederick Hurst Green, 1895-1938-



15. DAWES, Thomas Waldron, 1862-78



16. DAWES, Albert (son of Thomas above) Waldron, 1882-99



See subsequent smith, SCOTCHER, below.

17. DENNES, George, Gardner Street (present-day Herstmoncuex), 1866-82



See previous smith, OXLEY, below.

Same mark for axe

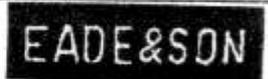
18. DUNSTER, Ernest Beckley, 1899



19. DUNSTER, Edgar Beckley, 1903-38-



20. EADE & Son (Alfred & Ernest) Buxted, c.1878-1909



21. FARLEY, William Upper Beeding, 1862-74 or descendant: 1890-1927, Peasmarsch (1905-1918, "and Iden")



21. FENNER, Henry Jarvis Brook, 1887-1918 (& Sons, 1922-38-)



22. FENNER, John Boarshead, 1899-1938-

Also maker of binman's hooks.



23. FOX, Stephen The Dicker, 1862-74



24. FREELAND, John Lion's Green, Waldron, 1862-70

See earlier John CAREY & later Edmund SMITH.

Archaic 'I' for 'J'



25. FUNNELL, T 14 St. Andrew's Square, Hastings, 1874-82

Also a side-axe & billhook recorded but not drawn.

T.FUNNELL

Ship's slice

26. GALLUP, Amos Cross-in-Hand, 1899 (when listed as 'Edge Tool Maker'). Widow's Holding, 1903

No tools known.

27. GATLAND, Otto Chailey, 1887-1913

Axe:-

Billhook:

O.GATLAND
CHAILEY

O.GATLAND
CHAILEY

28. HEMSLEY, George Holtye Common, 1905-34

G.HEMSLEY

29. HICKMOTT, William Ewhurst Green, 1870-87



30. HOADLEY, Peter Station Street, Lewes, 1878, listed 'Edge Tool Maker': 1882 Hoadley & Son; 1895, Fisher Street and listed as 'Edge Tool Makers' in 1887

HOADLEY
LEWES

HOADLEY
LEWES

31. KEMP, James High Street, Hailsham. Listed as 'Edge Tool Maker'

No tools known.

31. LOCKYER, Thomas Nevill Road, Crowborough, 1905-34



33. MALPASS, William Frederick Quarry Brook, Heathfield, 1915-38

W.F.MALPASS
HEATHFIELD

34. OXLEY, John Gardner Street, (present-day Herstmonceux) 1862. Later the forge of DENNES, see No. 17 above.



35. PILBEAM, W Burwash, 1852-87.



36. PILBEAM, J. Ticehurst. Right-of-blade marking:



37. PILBEAM, L Mews Road, St. Leonards, 1862.



38. READ, Samuel Ticehurst, 1862.



39. SCOTCHER, George Waldron Village, 1903-7.



40. SMITH, Edmund Lion's Green, Waldron, 1874-1909.

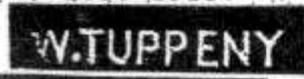
See also earlier smiths, John FREELAND and John CAREY, Nos. 24 & 12 above.



41. STACE, Henry Icklesham, 1862.

BILLHOOK SEEN: MARK AWAITS

42. TUPPENY, William Framfield, 1887; then Blackboys, 1890-1915. 'Framfield' erased:



S/A :- W. TUPPENY

WEST SUSSEX BLACKSMITH MAKERS OF EDGE TOOLS

1.	DAVIS, Godfrey	Donnington, 1874-91	
2.	FARLEY, William	Upper Beeding, 1862-74	
3.	GAPE, William	Aldingbourne, 1899-1938	
4.	HAINES, A	Plaistow. 1895-1909	
5.	HEATHFIELD, J IRON MONGER	HEATHFIELD Mis-struck: bottom line - "Crawley" missing :-	
6.	JUPP, Phineas	Lindfield, 1862-74 SA:-	
7.	JUPP, Walter H (and Ironmonger)	Horsham, 1934	
8.	KILLICK, Silas SOLOMON BEFORE 1890	Barns Green, 1890-1915 'Edge Tool Maker' in 1899 Side-axe (4):-	
9.	MOSS, A		
10.	MOSS, W. & A		
11.	MOSS, B	Chichester, 1867 'Edge Tool Maker' in Southgate Draw-knife:-	
12.	NEWNHAM, George	West Hoathly, 1915	
13.	RUSSELL Brothers	Hurstpierpoint, 1891	

1.	ASHDOWN, H	Borough Green, 1859-67 Hop-knife:-	
2.	BEALE, James (or BEALL)	High Street, Tenterden, 1859-87. 'Edge Tool Maker' in 1878 & 1887 Both marks on one billhook:-	 
3.	BEALE, Thomas (or BEALL)	Tenterden, 1859-78. 'Edge Tool Maker' in 1887 Wheelwright's Gouges (2):-	  TENTERDEN
4.	BINGHAM, James	Great Chart, 1859-87	
5.	CROUCH, Thomas	Goudhurst, 1899	
6.	HARRIS, John	Victoria Works, Staple- hurst, 1887-99. 'Edge Tool Maker' in 1887	
7.	HIXSON, George	Woodchurch, 1867-1878	
8.	JOHNSON, Benjamin	Gills Green, Hawkhurst, 1878-99	FOR MARK, SEE SUPP- LEMENT No.1 BELOW
9.	PULLINGER & EADE	Edenbridge, 1878 Axe:-	
10.	PILBEAM, Henry 'H' distorted	Winchet Hill, Goudhurst, 1867. Kilndown, 1878	

11. PILBEAM, George Kilndown, 1887-99



12. TWYMAN, William Thomas Eastry, 1878-99



13. VENNER, George Bethersden, 1878-99



14. WICKHAM, Seal
Archaic 'I' for 'J'



COUNTRY FACTORY

1. SWIFT, William Seal

Many varied marks,
of which these
appear to be early:-



SEE ALSO 'FIRST SUPPLEMENT', BELOW

IRONMONGERS

With billhooks stamped with their Firm's name.

1. HAYWARD, S.E. & Co.
Cornelius Whitehouse
& Sons, Cannock

Tunbridge Wells.
Probably also sold
through the Firm's
Crowborough shop.

S.E. HAWARD & CO
TUNBRIDGE WELLS
CORNELIUS
WHITEHOUSE & SONS
CANNOCK

Drawn, but natural size:

10 1/2
101

2. LAUGHTON & JARRETT
Horsham

Maker unknown, but
some billhooks are
stamped with code
number, circled, on
right side

A billhook seen
stamped "LAUGHTON
& SON", predating
Partnership

139

LAUGHTON & JARRETT
HORSHAM

3. STEPHENS, J.H.
Horsham

Gilpin, Wedges Mills,
'Warranted'
Firm's name or right
side

J.H. STEPHENS
HORSHAM

W GILPIN
WEDGES MILLS
WARRANTED

4. TILL, W.C., Ltd.
1) Gilpin
2) Brades

Made & stamped at the
Tivoli Forge, St. Leon-
ards-on-Sea

W.C. TILL LTD
BATTLE

GOOD TEMPER

W.C. TILL LTD
BATTLE

Three examples of a different pattern to Laughton & Jarrett's with obscured marks but with a code number circled are known. Probably made by the same manufacturer as supplied Laughton & Jarrett, and representing a fifth, so-far-unidentified Ironmonger.

Good Temper and the 'Smiley Face' logo is one of the marks of Brades & Co (W Hunt & Sons), as can be seen on this billhook marked W C Till (sold on eBay in 2012)



Where the final resting-place of a tool can be established, the 'Fifteen Mile Rule' applies: that is to say, no tool - however old has travelled in the course of its life more than 15 miles from the forge where made. This reflects the local nature of the smith's work: he supplied users only in his own village and Parish. The only known exception is Silas Killick of Barns Green, whose side-axes have been found in East Sussex. This may be because this tool was his speciality, not - perhaps - made by many smiths.

The Rule is helpful in identifying marks consisting of simply the Christian name and surname initials, without the village initial, and where provenance is not known.

The following marks comprise commonly-listed initials and are of uncertain date. Their identification is therefore difficult, but it may be that second examples will surface, where provenance is known; or where local repute suggests a particular smith was an edge-tool maker.

Any suggestions as to possible/probable/certain identification will be welcome; and will feature in future Supplementary Lists.



Mark struck at angle



JW



Side-axe



Rakemaker's Side-axe

Two Kent Pattern side-axes, one from Folkestone



Lopping Axe



Unusually broad billhook, of Continental appearance. Mark appears complete so not likely an early Fenner



Small Axe



Both are early marks. Await pre-1862 Archive search



Kent Pattern axe



Side-axe



Lopping axe



Lopping axe



Side-axe (Mark inverted)

T. BODLE,
REGISTERED SHOEING SMITH.

Horses Shod on
the most
Improved
Principle.

—o—
Agent for all
kinds of
Agricultural and
Domestic
Machinery, &c.



Kitcheners and
Ranges of
every
description
Repaired on the
Shortest Notice.

—o—
General
Jobbing Smith.

Edge Tool Maker.

SIDLEY GREEN, BEXHILL.

Member of the *Worshipful Company of Farriers.*

This list was compiled by Tony Bayfield, from the Lewes -Eastbourne area in Sussex, who had an interest in the history of the local Kent and Sussex iron industry, and of the tools made there and used in the woodlands and coppices. He obtained makers' marks on the tools from many sources, including collectors such as Richard Filmer, Fred Hams and myself.

Sadly I lost contact with him some 20+ years ago, so I am publishing this on my website without his consent, but in the hope that he will be pleased that the work he did will now be available for other tool enthusiasts.

Tony carried out his research in an era before the Internet, e-mail and digital photography, and is all the more remarkable for that – I remember sending him 35mm prints, tracings of the outline and a rubbing of the maker's mark on the few Kent/Sussex tools in my collection.

Since his work, I guess more information has come to light, but equally much more work remains to be done...

The following contains a few of my comments on his notes:

Page 1: he mentions the lack of marking of a village or town, but certainly on later tools this is common, and on French tools it is very common, so I guess England was little different.

Page 2: he mentions a lack of edge tools from East Anglia – I have found many examples of Norfolk billhooks made by local smiths, some marked and some not. It is also worth noting that William Swift tools are found in a wide range of patterns from counties to the north of London, so some later makers' output was considerable. However he is probably correct in stating that few smiths had the need to mark their work or advertise their products.

Hardening and tempering appears a mystical, almost magical, art to those who do not know how to carry it out. In fact the principles are fairly basic, and were taught to all pupils in school metalwork classes from the 1950's to the 1990's... High carbon steel (0.8% to 1.2% carbon) will harden if heated to a bright red and then quenched. However it will be brittle, and may have hairline cracks if quenched too fast... It then needs to be tempered by heating to a lower temperature (in the range 200°C to 300°C) to remove the brittleness and impart some toughness. Simple, but easy to get wrong and ruin a good tool, hence the 'secrets' of the smith.

Couple this to the somewhat unknown qualities of the steel used (one American edge tool maker gave up, rather than attempt to learn how to harden it, after his steel supplier changed the quality of the steel for the third time), the fact that often the steel cutting edge was forge welded to a wrought iron body, and some steels with a low carbon content would not harden, and needed carburising to increase the carbon content, and the simple can become complex, and thus mystical.....

However, most if not all, smiths could probably harden a cutting edge if required – shoeing smiths had a ready supply of high carbon steel in the form of farriers' rasps – many could, but I guess many did not, make edge tools.... I doubt that the Kent/Sussex area was very different from other areas, but as this was Tony's homeland, I guess he may have been a little biased (Hampshire, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Devon had plenty of edge tool makers, and France with a similar sized population had nearly 5000* working during the same period as those shown in his study).

Tony, if you are still out there, please get in touch via my contact page....

*See the list elsewhere on my website (<http://billhooks.co.uk/serpes-et-serpettes-fr/les-taillandiers-et-taillanderies-de-france/>). Note, daily I am finding tools marked with names not recorded on my list, so the number is probably much higher...