

## Knapman & Son

### Hill Mill, Harberton nr Totnes, Devon

The firm of Knapman & Son is well known in the West Country for its range of edge tools. Even while writing this in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Knapman tools still turn up regularly at farm auctions and on eBay. The output of this small firm, with at its height some 8 or so employees, was quite large, with a range of tools being produced not only for agriculture, but also the Devon and Cornwall mining industry.

The firm dates from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a Robert Elliott established his edge tool works at Hill Mill, Harberton - a small village just outside Totnes in Devon. Devon was well served with edge tool makers, many of whom probably knew each other, and served apprenticeships with the same masters at some time. The most well known are Loder at Holbeam, near Newton Abbott; Lidstone of Kingsbridge near Torquay; Helston of Dunsford (later taken over by Morris) and the Finch Foundry at Sticklepath, which like Knapman and Morris survived well into the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Morris is still going, albeit as a one-man business, run by Richard Morris). There were probably other smaller edge tool makers, or blacksmiths who also made edge tools, but these are outside the scope of this study..

Robert Elliott was established as an edge tool maker by 1829:

there is this document on National Archives....

**marriage settlement: Robert Elliot of Harberton, edgetool maker**  
**date: 1829**

document ref. no. : 263/49

The 1841 Census shows two Robert Elliott's residing at Hill Mill, Harberton, Snr (70 - presumably retired) and Jr (35) listed as an Edge Tool Maker. The return shows Robert Snr as Inf (infirm??) and that a John Knapman, edge tool maker, and his family were also residing there (including John Jr, aged 7). It can be assumed that the father \* established the firm, and Robert Jr

\* His uncle, not his father see page 5 (below)

took over the business as in 1842 Robert Snr died, and his will describes him as an Edge Tool Maker.

Reference: PROB 11/1966/261

Description: Will of Robert Elliott, Edge Tool Maker of Harberton , Devon

Date: 08 August 1842

Held by: The National Archives, Kew

Legal status: Public Record

Robert Jr thus continued the business and at some time John Knapman went into partnership, as in 1850 the firm is listed in White's Directory as Elliott & Knapman... (see page 5 below)

Collard Mr. lime burner

2 Elliott (Rt.) & Knapman (Jno.) shovel & reaping hook mfrs. Hill Mills

5 Friend Miss

In the 1851 Census there is no male Elliott at Hill Mill, Catherine, Robert Jr's wife \* is listed as a Landed Proprietor, and John Knapman as employing 6 men (John Jr is not shown, maybe being apprenticed elsewhere).

Parish or Township of		Ecclesiastical District of		City or Borough of		Town of		Village of							
Name of Street, Place, or Road, and Name or No. of House		Name and Surname of each Person who abode in the house, on the Night of the 30th March, 1851		Relation to Head of Family		Condition		Age of		Rank, Profession, or Occupation		Where Born		Whether Blind, or Deaf-and-Dumb	
								Males		Females					
11 Hill Mill Cottage		Elizabeth Co	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife
		Elizabeth Co	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter
		John Loden	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head
		Mary Co	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife
		John Co	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son
		James Mervin	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant
12 Hill Mill Cottage		John Mervin	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head
		Agnes Co	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife
		William Co	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son	Son
		Henry Wotton	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant
		John Bourne	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant
13 Hill Mills		Bathurine Elliott	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife
		Elizabeth Co	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter
		John Knapman	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head
		Elizabeth Co	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife
		Sarah J. Co	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter	Daughter
14 Hill Mills		George Kennaford	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head	Head
		Ann Co	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife	Wife
		Maria Co	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister
		Maria Co	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister	Sister
		Grace Brindle	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant	Servant
Total of Houses		8		7		7		7		7		7		7	
Total of Persons		13		13		13		13		13		13		13	

\* Possibly not his widow as 4 years later Robert is shown as dissolving the partnership, see page 5 (below) - he is believed to have died in 1859??

The return also shows 4 members of the Stevens family working as blacksmiths, and also a John Loder \* (born in Dunsford) as an edge tool labourer – who the 6<sup>th</sup> employee was is not known, as he presumably lived outside the village.

The connection with Dunsford needs further research, as the Knapman name is shown there in the Census returns, and at this period the Iron Mill there was run by John Helson, an Exeter ironmonger. Is the John Loder related to the later Loder who ran the Holbeam Mill edge tool works??? Study of the family trees, and marriages, may well establish a better picture..

The partnership of Elliot & Knapman was formally dissolved in 1855, and John Knapman took over:

**N**OTICE is hereby given, that the Partnership heretofore subsisting between us the undersigned, Robert Elliott and John Knapman, carrying on business as Edge Tool Makers, at Hill Mill, in the parish of Harberton, in the county of Devon, has this day been dissolved by mutual agreement. All claims on the late partnership will be discharged by the said John Knapman, and all debts due to it will be received by him.—Witness our hands this 26th day of March, 1855.

*Robert Elliott.*  
*John Knapman.*

By 1856 the firm is shown in Kelly's Directory as John Knapman & Son, John Jr would be 22, and John Snr 50 at this time...

Knapman John & Son, edge tool manufacturers, Hill mills

In 1881 the Census shows John Knapman (46) as the head of the household as a farmer, and also as an edge tool maker employing 8 men, however he is no longer living at Hill Mill:

\* Update: In 1841 the same John Loder (also spelled Loader or Toder) was a Cutler's Journeyman working for John Helson at Dunsford. Twenty years later, in 1861, he is shown as an Innkeeper and Blacksmith at Ashprington about 3km SE of Harberton

The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the

13 [Page 19]

Civil Parish (or Township) of	City or Municipal Borough of	Municipal Ward of	Parliamentary Borough of	Town or Village or Hamlet of	Urban Sanitary District of	Rural Sanitary District of	Religious Parish or District of		
No. of House	ROAD STREET, &c. and No. of NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES (1) (2) (3) (4)	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON-DITION as to Marriage	AGE last Birthday of	Rank, Profession, or OCCUPATION	WHERE BORN	(1) Deaf-and-Dumb (2) Blind (3) Imbecile or Idiot (4) Lunatic
84	single cottages	1	Samuel J. Moore	Son		46	Schoolar	Lynton Harberton	
	do do		Robert Heath	Head	Mar	49	Farm Labourer	do Lynton	
			Sarah A. do	wife	do	32		do Harberton	
			William Heath	son	Mar	12	Schoolar	do do	
			Elizabeth A. Heath	daughter	do	6	do	do do	
			Robert do	Son	do	5		do do	
			William do	do	do	3		do do	
			Sarah do	do	do	10		do do	
85	The Vicarage	1	Richard Bantle	Head	Mar	59	vicar of Harberton	do Lynton	
			Philippa do	wife	do	59		do Dunsford	
			Arthur H. do	Son	Mar	21		do do	
			Louisa Sturford	daughter	do	61		do do	
			John C. Bantle	son	do	50	Late of 189 Feet	do Lynton	
			Elizabeth B. Mackay	serv	do	22	gent domestic	Widdowes St George	
			James B. Gill	do	do	26	Parlour Maid	Lynton Harberton	
			Elizabeth S. Hester	do	do	20	House Maid	do Harberton	
86	Swappes Lane	1	John Knapman	Head	Mar	56	James 220 employ 5 part 7 also large tool works Harberton	do Harberton	
			Elizabeth do	wife	do	49		do Lynton	
			John H. do	Son	Mar	18		do Harberton	
			James J. Hodges	serv	do	16	Domestic serv	do South Devon	
87	Harberton village	1	James Hadgill	Head	Mar	46	Farm Labourer	do Harberton	
			Ann do	wife	do	40		do Harberton	
			Benjamin do	Son	Mar	11	Schoolar	do do	
			James do	do	do	9	do	do do	
			George H. do	Son	do	7	do	do do	
	Total of Houses...		Total of Males and Females...			11	14		

NOTE.—Draw the pen through such of the words of the headings as are inappropriate.

Eng—Sheet C

In 1888 John Knapman died (at this date John Snr would have been 82, and John Jr 54, but as there is no mention of John Snr in the 1881 Census return, it can be assumed this was John Jr)

**JOHN KNAPMAN, Deceased.**

Pursuant to the Statute-22nd and 23rd Vic., cap. 35.

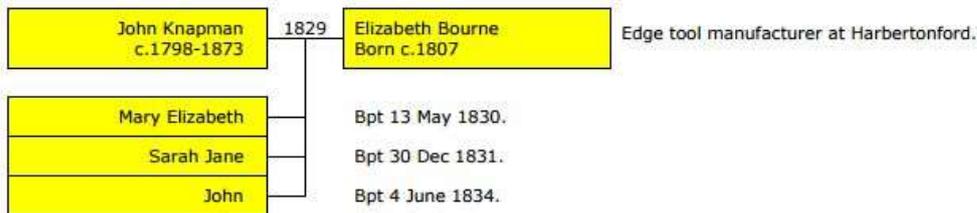
**A**LL persons having any claims on the estate of John Knapman, late of Harberton, in the county of Devon, Farmer and Edge Tool Manufacturer (who died on the 23rd day of October, 1888, and whose will and codicil were proved in the Exeter District Registry on the 1st day of January, 1890, by William Condy, of Totnes, Devon, Gentleman, and Robert Elliott Bourne, of Totnes, Devon, Land Agent and Auctioneer, the executors therein named), are hereby required to send in particulars of their claims to the undersigned, on or before the 14th day of April, 1890; after which day the assets of the said testator will be dealt with and distributed by the said executors; having regard only to the claims of which they have had notice.—Dated this 24th day of February, 1890.

**WINDEATT and WINDEATT, 19, High-street, Totnes, Devon, Solicitors for the Executors.**

Stanley Oldfield had produced some further information as part of his genealogy research:

*Family WT6: The family of John's son John:*

On 26 November 1829 John married Elizabeth Bourne in the parish of Harberton. One of the witnesses was John Lear (see below), and their children were all baptised at Harberton.



John founded an edge tool manufacturing business at Hill Mill, Harbertonford in partnership with Robert Elliott, presumably using water power (in just the same way as can be seen today at Finch's Foundry, a National Trust working exhibit at Sticklepath, near South Zeal). In 1855 the partnership was dissolved, and Robert Elliott's died in 1859. The business was then known as Knapman & Son, a name it retained even after the family was no longer involved in the business. I owe this information to Stanley Oldfield who is researching the history of the Hill Mill business. His researches also show that in an early land lease John Knapman and Robert Elliott were both described as nephews of Robert Elliott the elder, who owned the property. The relationship was probably via Robert Elliott's first wife.

At the time of the 1841 census, as mentioned above, John's uncle Edward was staying with John and his family at Hill Mill (other than Mary Elizabeth, who was staying in Exeter recorded as Mary, with John Lear, a grocer in South Street who had been a witness at her parents' marriage). Robert Elliott (and his uncle, also Robert Elliott) was living next door. A Mary Rowell and a Mary Lear were also both staying at Hill Mill, emphasising the strong links between the four families.

In 1851 Sarah Jane was at home with her parents, and Mary Elizabeth and John were visiting a family at Ashprington. John (the father) died on 13 March 1873 leaving a will which was proved by his son John. The younger John in turn left a will worth over £4,400 which shows that he died on 23 October 1888.

Sarah Jane was subsequently married to William Harvey of Leigh Farm at Harberton on 15 August 1854, according to a report in the Western Times of 19 August of that year.



From the above it would seem that Robert Elliott Snr was the uncle of both Robert Elliott Jr and John Knapman, so perhaps they both jointly inherited the business, and thus the partnership dates from Robert Snr's death in 1842.

It would be useful to look at all the available Census returns for all of Harberton, especially Hill Mill in 1881 – to establish who was living aqt the Hill Mill Cottages and the Mill (apparently 4 separate dwelling, two at each location).

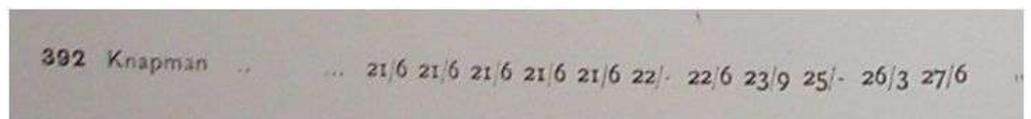
The later history of the firm remains to be researched, but it is believed that Knapman & Son survived until the 1950's, when the name & goodwill were acquired by A & F Parkes, who with Bulldog Tools later became part of English Tools Ltd. Later ETL also bought out the business of Morris at Dunsford (until Alec Morris bought the site back in the 1980's).

Morris had a stamp on the premises for Knapman, and thus presumably made tools to be sold under that name.



Note that they used Knapmans (not Knapman or Knapman's)

A Knapman pattern hook also appears in the trade 1899 catalogue of Isaac Nash, Stourbridge (this pattern is now known as a Devon half-turn hook)..



Knapman stamped their tools:

KNAPMAN & SON

BEST STEEL

Some tools also bear a size number stamp, but not a size in inches as most other makers used.

The following information comes from John Dudgeon, a distant relative of the Knapman's:

*Knapman is a distant connection relative being part of the descent of a Gidley line of John Knapman's wife, Charlotte Bradridge. I have very little regarding the edge tool business but maybe the following will help:*

*Mill Hill Edge Tool Foundry Harbertonford - in the Harbourne Valley between Harberton and Harbertonford.*

*In 1820, an old grist mill at Harberton was converted to an edge tool mill by the addition of two tilt-hammers and a set of grind stones, driven by a large wheel fed by a mile-long leet connecting with the River Harborne. Around 1850, the plant consisted of four tilt hammers, two grindstones, a polishing wheel and an iron splitter*

*Edge Tools (agricultural) manufactured by Messrs Knapman making superior hand-made tools since the 1830s. A water wheel stood in for "grid" electricity as a power supply.*

*In the 1920s the factory made over 100 different types of hooks, hoes and shovels - in the 1950s production fell to 35 types mostly grass cutting hooks and special orders. These sold to as far away as Dorset, Somerset and Gloucestershire as well as throughout Devon and Cornwall..The business operated until 1954.*

The copy of the Knapman catalogue that follows is from the collection of Scotty Dodd, who is in contact with Stanley Oldfield (see above) and hopefully further information will be forthcoming....

64

HOOKS, HOES,  
SHOVELS, ETC.



KNAPMAN & SON,  
HILL MILL, NEAR TOTNES,  
DEVON.

*all prices plus 10/p*

29 NOV 15

## Illustrated Catalogue

K 20

OF

# Hooks, Hoes, Shovels, Etc.

MANUFACTURED BY

## KNAPMAN & SON,

HILL MILL, NEAR TOTNES, DEVON.

### INDEX.

	PAGE		PAGE
Axes ... ..	12	Hooks, Reap ... ..	7
Canterbury Hoes ... ..	3	"  Spear ... ..	5
Cleavers ... ..	13	"  Staff ... ..	7
Double Hoe ... ..	3	"  Thatchers' ... ..	10
Gutter Knives ... ..	15	"  Trimming ... ..	7
Hay Knives ... ..	11	"  Wood ... ..	14
Hoes ... ..	2 & 3	"  Wreath ... ..	6
Hooks, Bill ... ..	4	Mattocks ... ..	3
"  Bramble ... ..	6	Pole Axes ... ..	12
"  Browse ... ..	6	Pruning Chisels ... ..	10
"  Cutback ... ..	5	Shovels ... ..	14 & 15
"  Forest ... ..	4	Spuds ... ..	3
"  Furze ... ..	6	Thatchers' Knives ... ..	10
"  Fuel ... ..	5	Turf Cutters ... ..	15
"  Grass ... ..	7	"  Spades ... ..	15
"  Half Moon ... ..	4	Twohills ... ..	3
"  Half Turn ... ..	5	Turnip Hooks ... ..	10
"  Hewing ... ..	8	Yex or Slater's Axe ... ..	12
"  Hurdle ... ..	5		

KNAPMAN & SON,



No. K 1  
Bury Hoe.



No. K 5  
Spill or Tanged Hoe.



No. K 9  
Turnip Hoe.



No. K 2  
Bury Hoe.



No. K 6  
Spill or Tanged Hoe.



No. K 10  
Turnip Hoe.



No. K 3  
Bury Hoe.



No. K 7  
Spill or Tanged Hoe.



No. K 11  
Turnip Hoe.



No. K 4  
Bidsford Hoe.



No. K 8  
Half Moon Spill or Tanged Hoe.



No. K 12  
Turnip Hoe.



No. K 13  
Backland Hoe.



No. K 14  
Solid Dutch  
Hoe.

HILL MILL, NEAR TOTNES.



No. K 51  
Weed Iron or Spud.



No. K 52  
Yeovil Mattock.



No. K 53  
Round Eye Devon Mattock.



No. K 54  
Devon Eye Mattock.



No. K 55  
Planting Mattock.



No. K 56  
Axe Eye Mattock.



No. K 57  
Pointed Planting Mattock.



No. K 58  
Bridport Mattock.



No. K 59  
Twobill.



No. K 60  
Double Hoe.



No. K 61  
Canterbury Hoe,  
2 prongs.



No. K 62  
Canterbury Hoe,  
3 prongs.

4 13  
**KNAPMAN & SON,**



No. K 101  
Dorset Wood Hook.



No. K 102  
Bridgewater Wood Hook.



No. K 103  
Forest Hook.



No. K 104  
Bill Patch Hook.



No. K 105  
Bristol Bill Hook.



No. K 106  
Castle Carey Bill Hook.



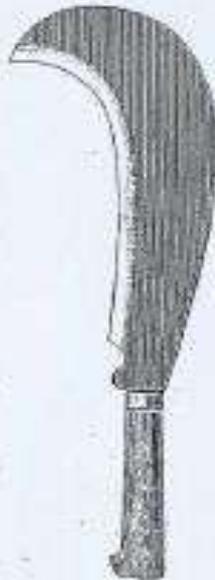
No. K 107  
Half Moon Hook.

HILL MILL, NEAR TOTNES.

5



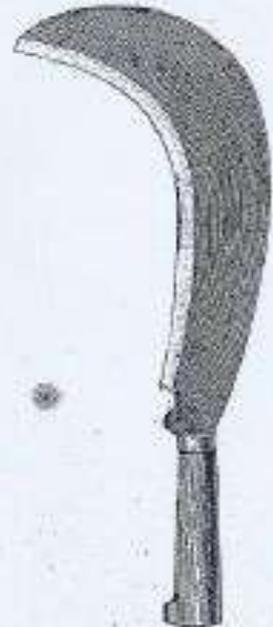
No. K 108  
Half Turn Hook.



No. K 109  
Somerset Half Turn  
Hook.



No. K 110  
Devon Half Turn  
Hook.



No. K 111  
Fuel Hook.

*P/1552*

*P/1548*



No. K 112  
Round Spear Hook.

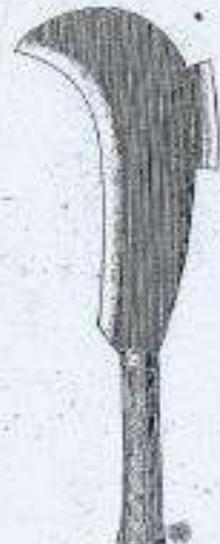
*P/1546*



No. K 113  
Bill Spear Hook.

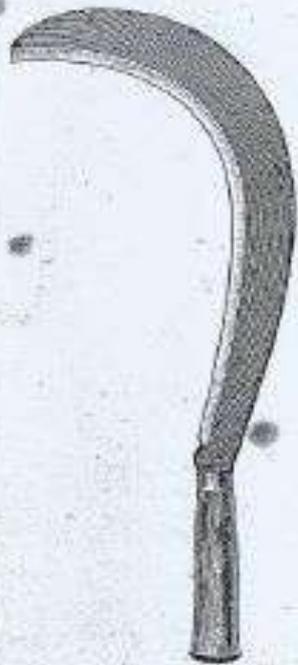


No. K 114  
Hurdle Hook.



No. K 115  
Cut Back Hook.

KNAPMAN & SON,



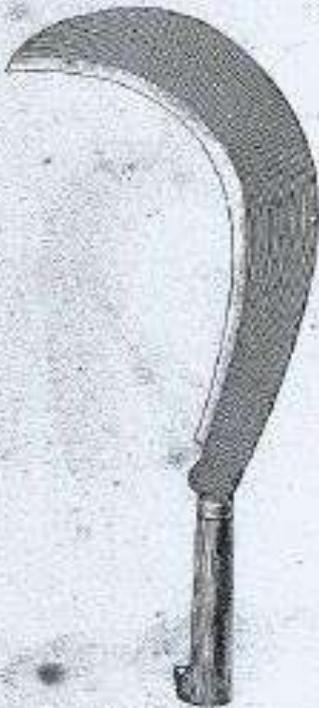
No. K 116  
Bramble Hook.



No. K 118  
Devon Browse or Wreath Hook.



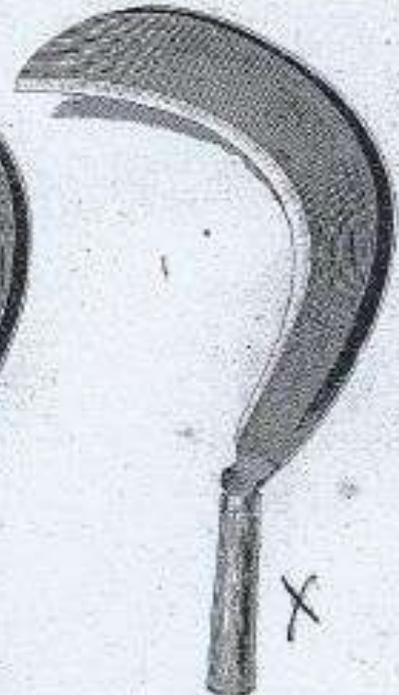
No. K 120  
North Devon Browse Hook.



Furze Hooks,  
No. K 122—Plain, Straight  
.. K 123— .. Cranked  
.. K 124—Ribbed, Straight  
.. K 125— .. Cranked



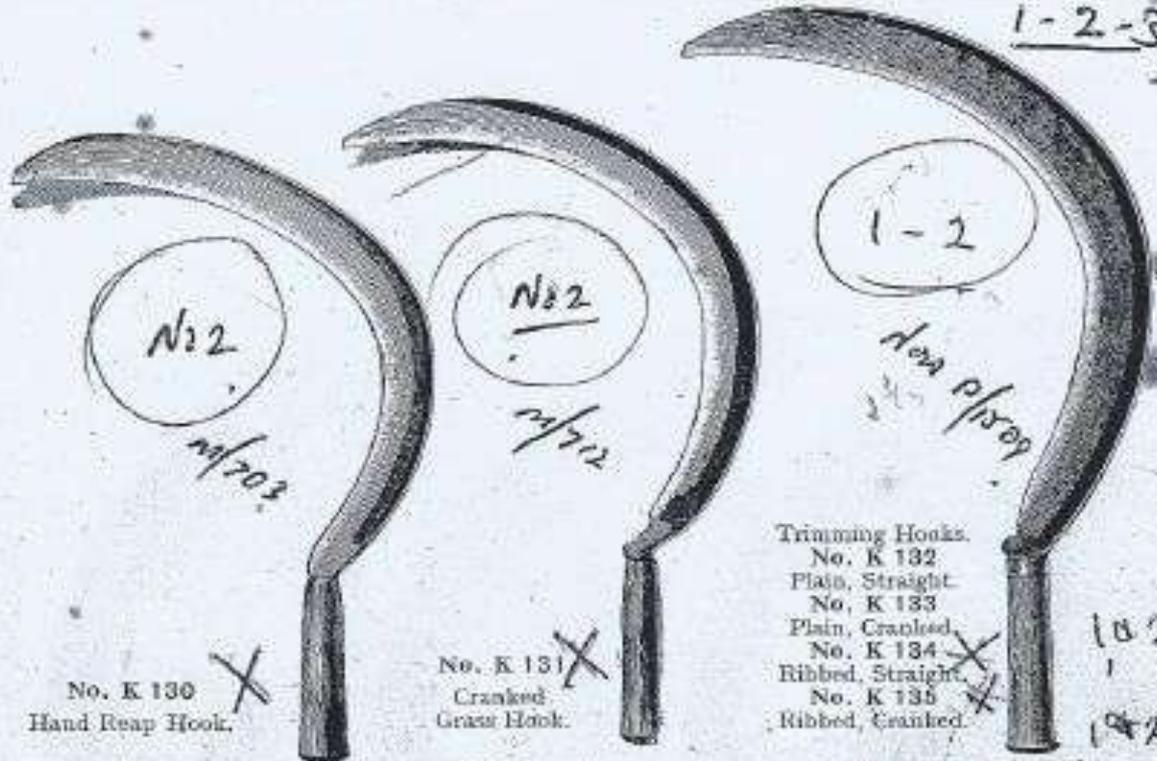
No. K 127  
Cornish Furze Hook,  
Straight.



No. K 128  
Cornish Furze Hook,  
Cranked.

(3)

# HILL MILL, NEAR TOTNES

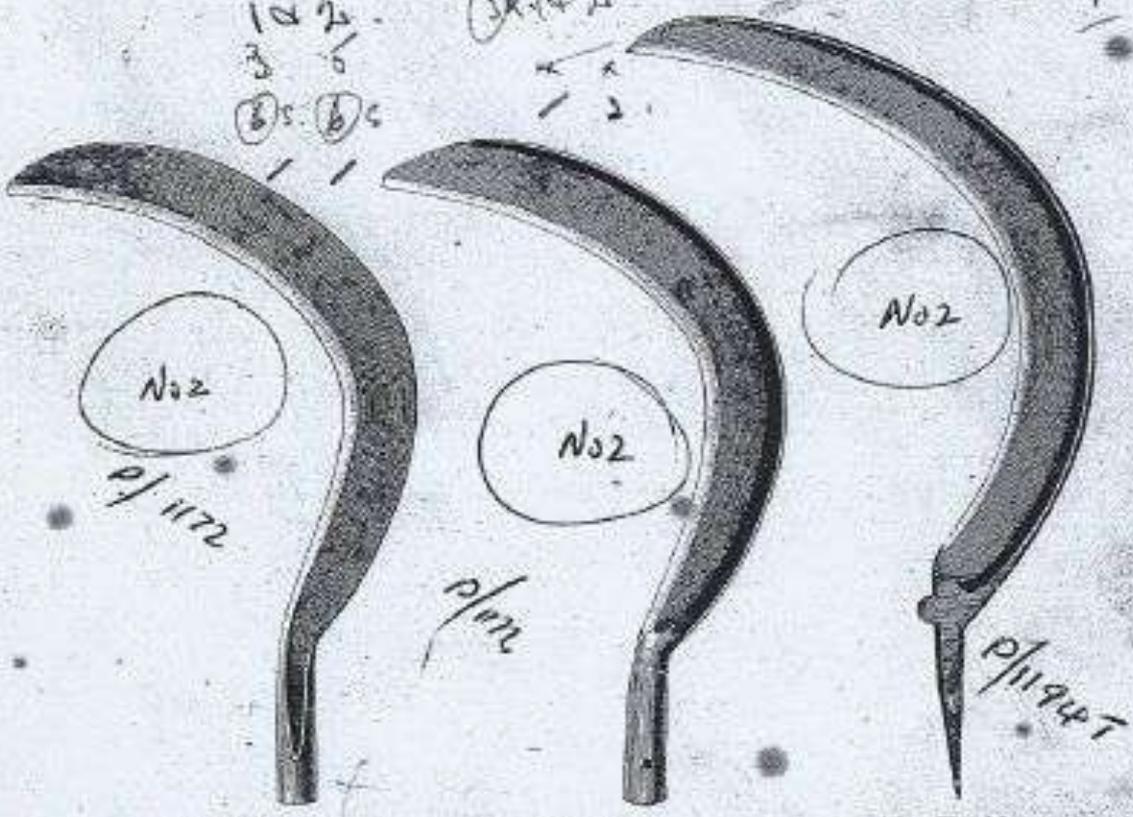


No. K 130  
Hand Reap Hook.

No. K 131  
Cranked  
Grass Hook.

Trimming Hooks.  
No. K 132  
Plain, Straight.  
No. K 133  
Plain, Cranked.  
No. K 134  
Ribbed, Straight.  
No. K 135  
Ribbed, Cranked.

10 2 5 6  
1 1  
10 2 1 6  
1 1

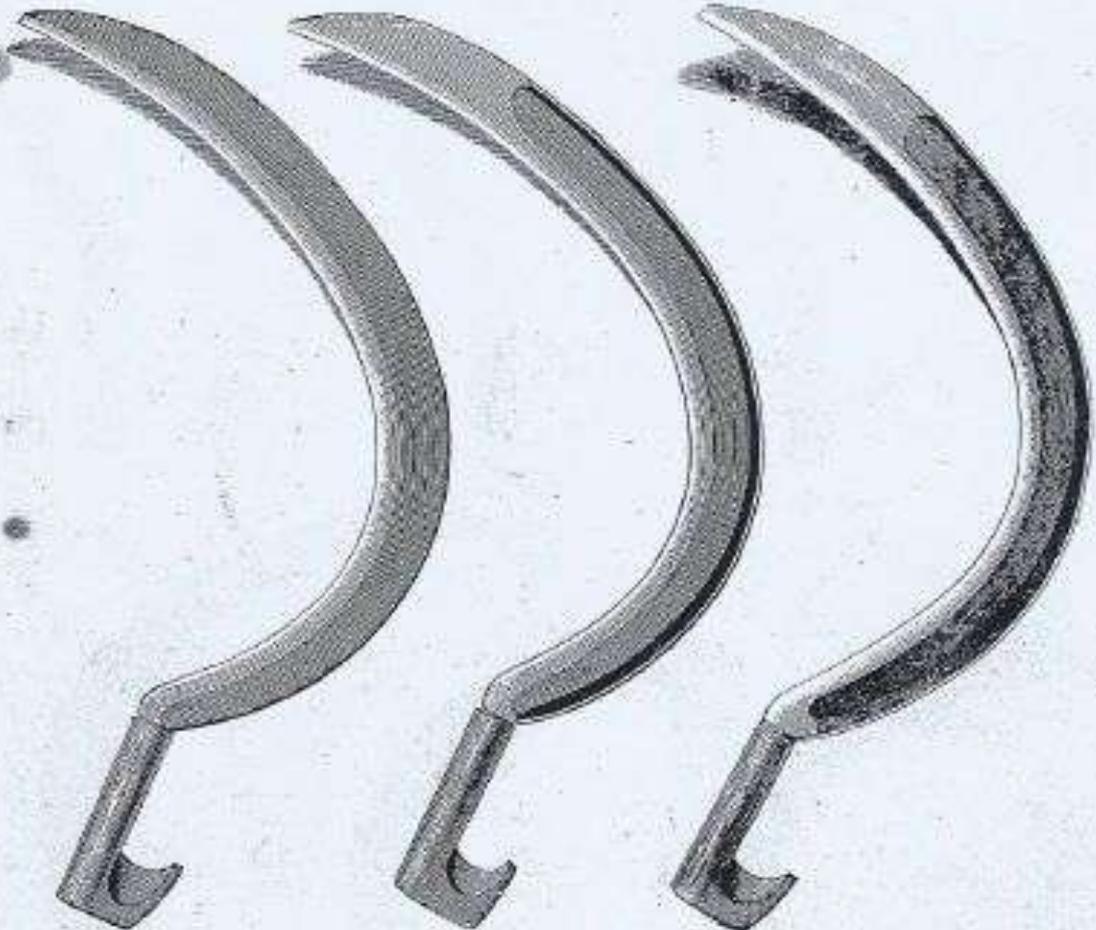


No. K 136  
Plain Socket Staff Hook.

No. K 137  
Ribbed Socket Staff Hook.

No. K 138  
Ribbed Tang or Stert  
Staff Hook.

**KNAPMAN & SON,**



No. K 140  
Dorset Hewing Hook,  
Plain.

No. K 141  
Dorset Hewing Hook,  
Ribbed.

No. K 143  
Tiverton Hewing Hook,  
Ribbed.

HILL MILL, NEAR TOTNES.



No. K 144  
Yeovil Hewing  
Hook, Plain.

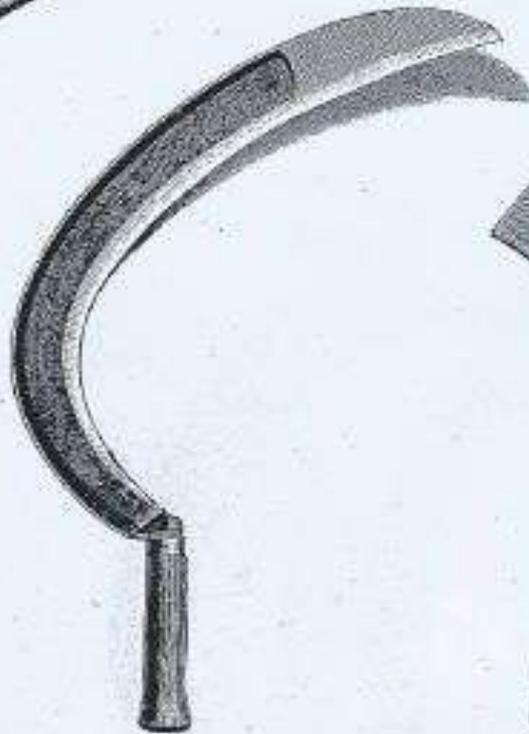
No. K 145  
Yeovil Hewing  
Hook, Ribbed.

No. K 147  
Devon Hewing  
Hook, Ribbed.

No. K 149  
Half Hewing  
Hook.



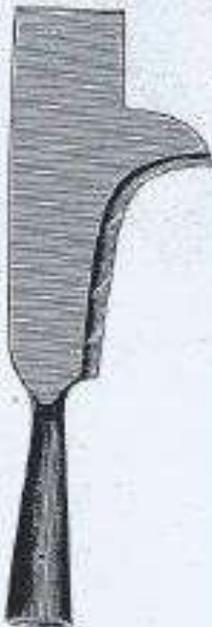
No. K 150  
Iron Handle Thatcher's Hook.



No. K 151  
Thatcher's Hook.



No. K 251  
Thatcher's Knife.



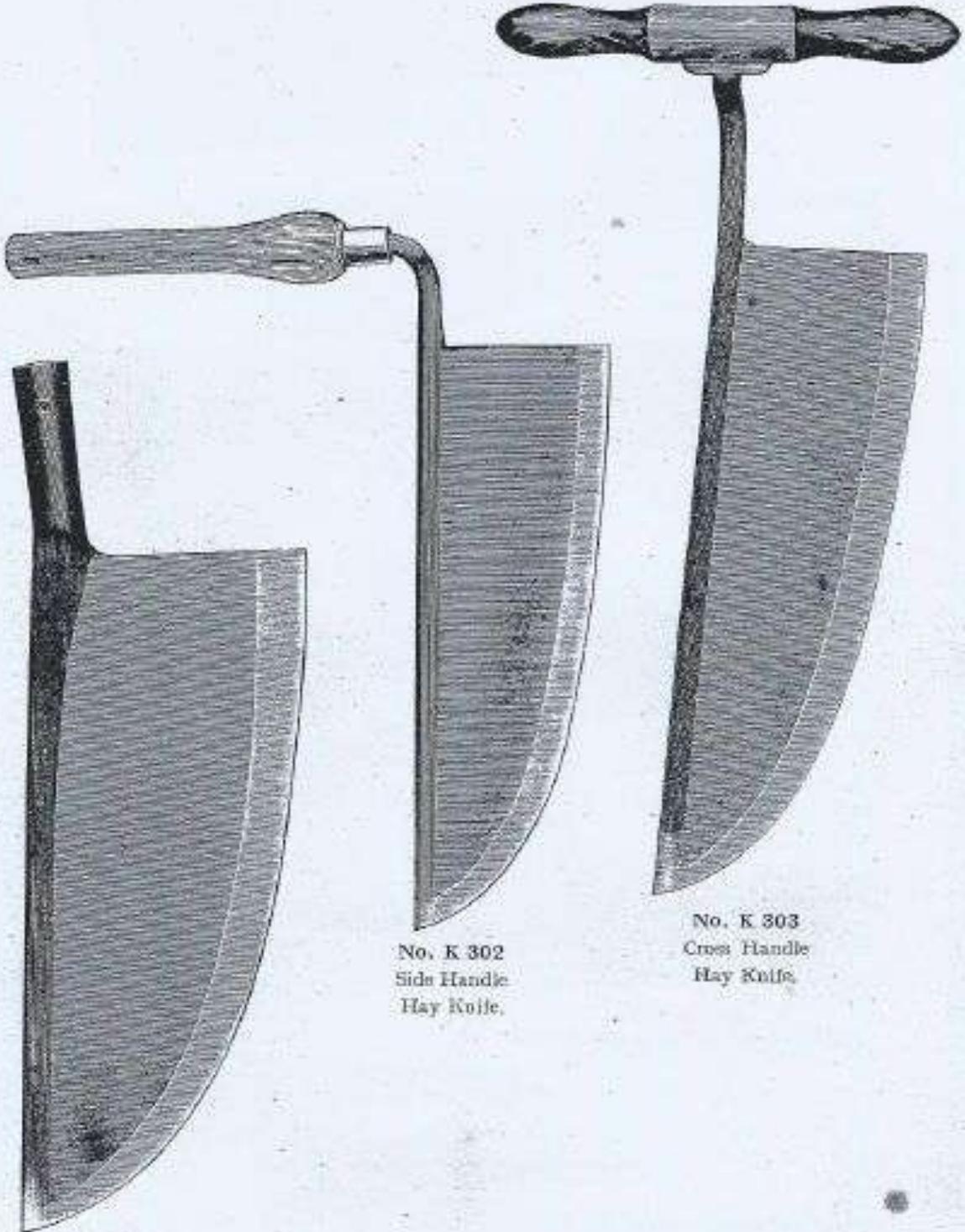
No. K 252  
Pruning Chisel.



No. K 253  
Pruning Chisel.



No. K 254  
Turnip Hook.



No. K 301  
Socket Hay Knife.

No. K 302  
Side Handle  
Hay Knife.

No. K 303  
Cross Handle  
Hay Knife.



No. K 351  
Kent Axe, Handled.



No. K 352  
Side Axe.



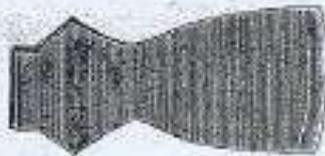
No. K 353  
Felling Axe.



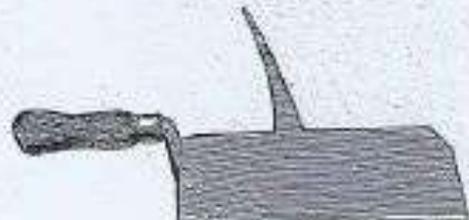
No. K 354  
Kent Axe Head.



No. K 355  
Corner or Irish Axe.



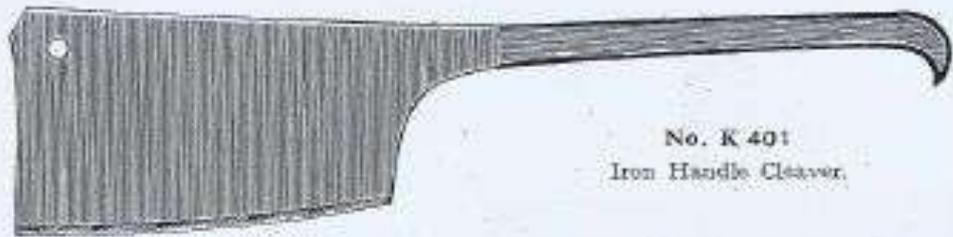
No. K 356  
Narrow Bulge or North Devon Axe.



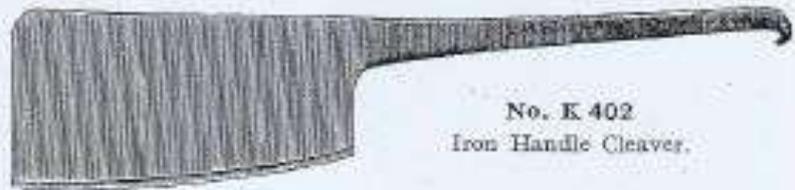
No. K 357  
Yox or Slaters' Axe.



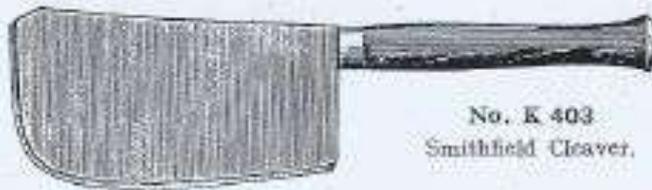
No. K 358  
Butcher's Pole Axe.



No. K 401  
Iron Handle Cleaver.



No. K 402  
Iron Handle Cleaver.



No. K 403  
Smithfield Cleaver.



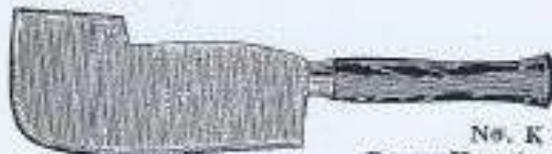
No. K 404  
Lamb Chopper.



No. K 405  
Round Cleaver.



No. K 406  
Cornish Housekeeper's  
Cleaver.



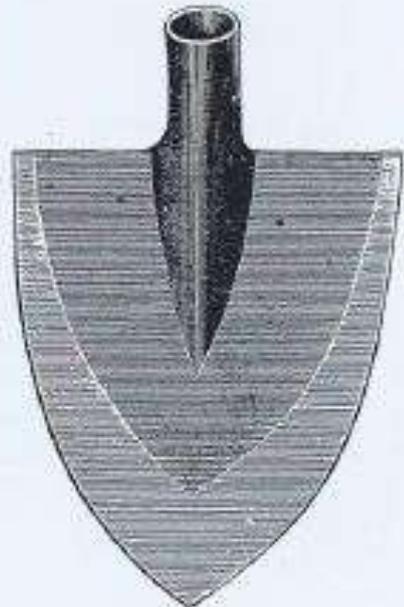
No. K 407  
Devon Housekeeper's Cleaver.



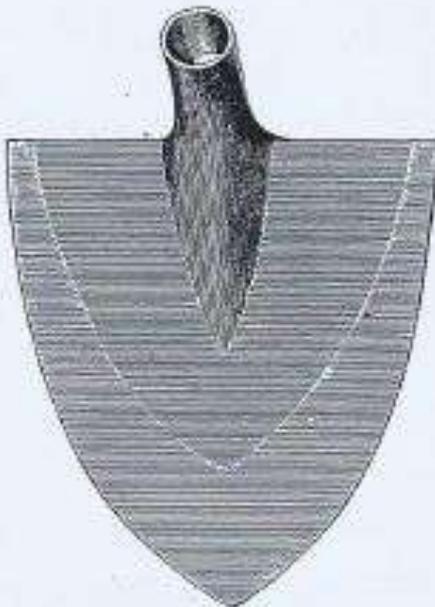
No. K 408  
Devon Cleaver.



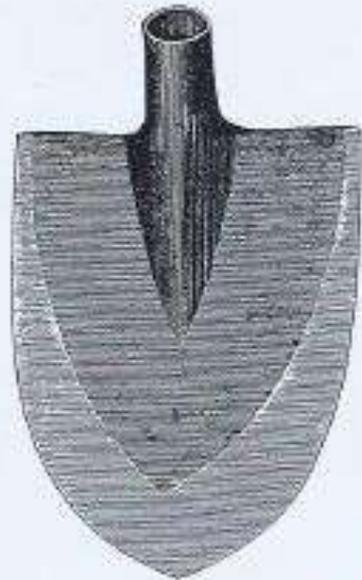
No. K 451  
Cornish Shovel.



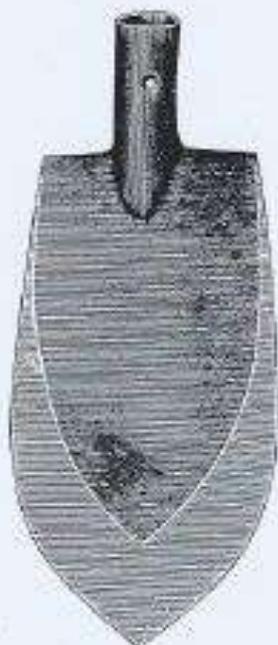
No. K 452  
Devon Shovel.



No. K 453  
Devon Shovel, Kingsbridge Pattern.



No. K 454  
Chard Shovel.



No. K 455  
Turf Spade.



No. K 456  
Square or Guttering Shovel.



No. K 457  
Turf Cutter.



No. K 458  
Gutter Knife.

A few images of Knapman billhooks and furze hooks:

