

‘Deceitful Wares’ — the quality control of knives by the Searchers of the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire

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ABSTRACT: In the 1624 Act of Incorporation which established the Sheffield-based Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire, there was a clause stating that all blades must have an edge of steel. The Company inspected manufactured items and policed the use of cutlers’ identifying marks. Searchers were entitled to enter workshops to seek ‘deceitful wares’ — blades without steel or otherwise of poor quality. Because they also monitored the registration of the cutlers’ marks, the Searchers could identify manufacturers. The Company’s maintenance of restrictions led to conflicts with Sheffield cutlers who wanted to respond to economic change and to developments in iron and steel manufacture in the 18th and 19th centuries. Using the records of the Cutlers’ Company, this paper traces the Company’s efforts to deal with cast-iron goods and to restrict the use of trademarks which made claims over the quality of the metal in the blade.

Introduction

For centuries, Sheffield has been known for the manufacture of high-quality cutlery. Developing from a medieval craft organisation controlled by the Manorial Court, the Sheffield cutlers expanded into a locally dominant industry employing the majority of Sheffield’s workers, as craftsmen and as suppliers of subsidiary materials and services. After 1624, the Cutlers’ Company was the controlling organisation. It regulated the trade, exercising its control through by-laws which insisted on the production of serviceable goods. The records of the Company contain details of infringements of its rules, blades without a steel edge, or the mis-use of another man’s mark, but more significant were the problems caused by the marking of goods, intended to indicate quality. Although Sheffield made and exported cheap items, the quality of knives and related goods improved during the 18th century and surpassed those produced in London. However, a crisis arose late in the 18th century with the increasing use of cast iron for cutlery and forks, which greatly increased output, very cheaply, but which produced a spurious article. This paper will trace the background to these issues and describe the conduct of the Cutlers’

Company in the face of the cast-metal cutlery and false marking scandals.

The 1624 Act of Incorporation

When the Sheffield cutlers successfully petitioned the English Parliament for an Act of Incorporation in 1624, the local cutlery trade appears to have been at least 300 years old (Brown 1894, 76). The economic importance of the trade had been sufficient for the Lords of the Manor, the Earls of Shrewsbury, to control aspects of the trade through their Manorial Court. The mid-16th century ordinances, drawn up by this court, were principally concerned with work practices, apprenticeships and the registration of identifying marks (Sheffield Archives, RC 159). They were later to be incorporated into the rules of the Cutlers’ Company. By 1614 a specific cutlers’ jury was meeting regularly, presumably due to the amount of such trade matters coming before the main court. In 1616, however, the last resident Lord died, and the Sheffield cutlers felt the lack of organisation of manorial business, so lobbied Parliament for the right to control their trade. In 1624, the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire in the County of York was established to continue the system that had evolved in the Manor

Court over the previous decades. The medieval London craft guilds of cutlers, goldsmiths, saddlers, etc had formalised their rights and privileges by receiving a Royal Charter, which confirmed their status as livery companies. The members of these companies not only operated a similar restrictive control over their trades, but membership also conferred some civic rights and responsibilities. However, Sheffield was without a town council or a formal local government, so the members of the Cutlers' Company held no civic positions, although many were involved in local bodies such as the Town Trustees and the Church Burgesses, which fulfilled some of the functions and duties of a town council.

The geographical area of Hallamshire centered on the three parishes of Sheffield, but also included Ecclesfield to the north and west and Handsworth to the south east; in addition, the Company's control extended over an area six miles beyond the outer boundaries of these parishes. The 1624 Parliamentary Act laid down the framework within which the Company could construct its bye-laws, in order to control aspects of the local trades (Cutlers' Company archives (henceforth CC) B1/1/2b). The Act specified the trades as being the manufacture of knives, scissors, shears and sickles, with strict craft separation. By the end of the 17th century, awlbladesmiths, file-smiths and scythesmiths had joined the Company, and by late in the 18th century forkmakers and razormakers were also considered as separate craft groups when they registered their apprentices with the Company. These last two groups of craftsmen evolved from those cutlers who had probably been making these items since at least the end of the 17th century.

The Cutlers' Company was to consist of 33 annually-elected men, comprising the Master Cutler, two Wardens, six Searchers and 24 Assistants. These men 'on the Company' were not paid for their work, but expenses were claimed, with fines imposed for failure to attend meetings, but other officials—the Beadle and the Clerk—were paid. The rest of the trained craftsmen were known as the Commonalty and had little say in the running of the Company. At the minimum age of 21 and on completion of an apprenticeship to a master which had been registered with the Company, a man could choose to record his freedom. There was no requirement for him to produce a masterpiece or to demonstrate his skills in order to become a Freeman; he simply paid 3s 4d, registered his mark and paid an annual mark rent of 2d. The Company entered his name into a book of freedoms, with a summary of any biographical details, together with an impression of the mark, which was recorded in a mark book. Thus, he became a man 'who

owned his own work', being identifiable to the Searchers. The Searchers were responsible for checking, through the mark books, that the proposed marks of Freeman were not too similar to existing marks, or carried covert messages about the quality of the goods. In addition, the Searchers played an active part in the organisation of the trades, being responsible for quality control, and were entitled to enter premises to search out 'deceitful' wares such as cutlery devoid of a steel edge or struck with another man's mark.

The importance of the craftsmen's marks and the relevance of the clause in the 1624 Act that all cutting edges should be made of steel, came together in the last quarter of the 18th century, with the spread of the practice of making cutlery and forks from cast iron. The manufacturing methods for cutlery and edge tools were dictated by the availability of materials and power sources. Making a blade from a ferrous metal had, for centuries, involved the heating of a bar of metal and forging it on an anvil into the required shape. Manual hammering was later replaced by steam-powered hammers in factories and associated workshops. After the blade had been forged into shape it was reheated and quenched to adjust the temper of the metal—balancing the hardness and brittleness—according to the requirements for the blade. The blade was ground to remove forging marks and to give it a sharp edge, then it was glazed and finally assembled into a table knife, a pair of scissors, etc. It is assumed that the majority of apprenticeships included training in all these aspects of cutlery manufacture but many men later specialised in one process, becoming a forger, for instance, or a maker of specific goods, such as table knives, open razors or pocket knives. Over the years this specialisation and fragmentation led to many Freeman and larger manufacturers using a range of out-worker craftsmen to fulfil orders. With this complexity of the trade organisation and the labour-intensive nature of manufacture, it was essential to know who was making what, and that quality was being maintained. This was further complicated by the practice of stamping merchants' or customers' names on blades, which gave unscrupulous manufacturers an opportunity for passing sub-standard goods or for false marking.

Manufacturing blades

The manufacturing success of Sheffield depended on the availability of materials for the blades and handles, and on associated supplies such as grindstones, together with work-spaces and power-sources. To comply with the legal requirement that a blade must have a steel edge it was important to have a reliable supply of steel of a

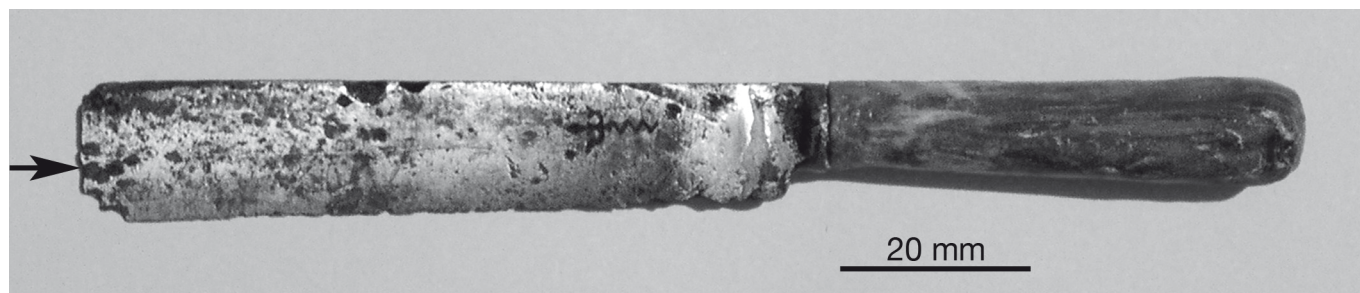


Figure 1: An example of a knife made late in the 17th century, with the mark of Joseph Toppliffe, registered in 1669. The blade is damaged near the handle; on the original object there can be seen a faint line down the centre of the blade, parallel with the edge, indicated by an arrow, where the steel overlays the iron. Length 128mm (CC, no. 020002). See also back cover.

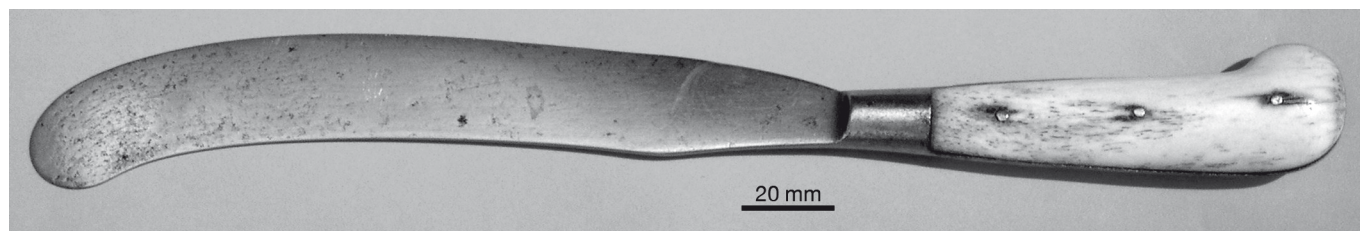


Figure 2: A table knife with bone scales for the handle, made by Edmund Windle, c 1760s. Shown here is the 'thumbprint', the oval shape next to the handle where the iron of the bolster overlaps the steel of the blade. This faint mark is enlarged (inset). Length 290mm (CC no. 020103). See also back cover.

suitable quality, but in the first half of the 17th century steel had to be brought to Sheffield from abroad or from elsewhere in England. This made steel more expensive than locally produced wrought iron, and early entries for fines in the Company's account books show that some men still had not totally accepted the need to use steel.

In the 1680s, the Company made efforts to support local craftsmen by opening a Storehouse, with the aim of purchasing raw materials, selling them on to the cutlers and buying back their finished products (Pollard, 1997). The records for this venture detail the relative costs of iron and steel and, from the number of knives and scissors brought back, it is clear that only a very small amount of steel was forged on to the blade (Fig 1). During the 18th century, the growing number of local cementation steel furnaces increased the availability of shear steel and led blade forgers to use this for the whole of the blade, forge-welding it on to the iron bolster and tang (Fig 2). The result of this forging process can often be seen in the so-called 'cutler's thumbprint' on the reverse of the blade, an oval impression next to the handle where the iron of the bolster overlaps the steel of the blade.

The Cutlers' Company again became involved in an economic venture when in 1759 it decided to supply steel to cutlers by building and operating a cementation furnace, later adding a crucible furnace (CC, D21/1-2). Its original aim was to make and sell steel from its furnace at slightly below the market rate, but with some profit for the Company, and the records show that the Company's

venture ran until the early 1770s, the furnace eventually being sold in 1784 (Barraclough 1972). Calculations from the accounts suggest that blister steel was being sold at £26 per ton in 1760. The invention and development of crucible steel making by Benjamin Huntsman in Sheffield in the 1740s seems initially to have had little impact on local cutlery manufacture, but records suggest that the Company began manufacturing crucible steel in 1764. This high-quality cast steel was even more expensive for the craftsmen: in 1766 the furnace produced cast steel at £50 per ton. Although the Sheffield cutlers might not have been willing to use this new steel for their blades, it is said that Robert Hinchliffe of Cheney Square made the first pair of cast-steel scissors in 1761 (Leader 1901, 69). There is no suggestion that men were casting the blades, but were forging cast steel bar into blades.

Even though the cutlers of Sheffield had access to some of the best steel available, it was expensive and blade manufacture was labour intensive. There was an easy solution—casting molten iron into moulds for blades and forks. This was a cheap and fast way to make a spurious product because, being brittle, cast iron is not a suitable metal for a knife blade. But the temptation was too great and increasing numbers of blades were produced, finished and passed off as being of forged steel, particularly for the export market. This practice highlights three issues. Firstly, a cast-iron knife blade, with no steel edge, is not fit for its purpose; secondly, these blades were often falsely marked suggesting that they were hand forged from steel, and thirdly, by undercutting

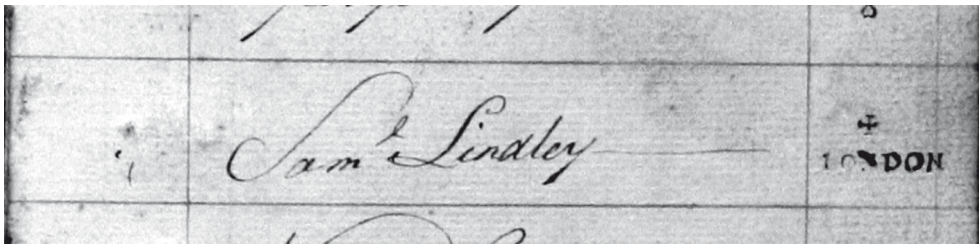


Figure 3: The mark of Samuel Lindley, a cross above 'LONDON' registered in 1772 (CC L1-7-1).

prices and selling inferior goods, there was a serious threat to the whole of the Sheffield cutlery industry if customers lost faith in the quality of its products. As the body with a legal responsibility over quality, the Company had to attempt to stop cast-iron blades being made and to prevent fraudulent marking.

Cutlers' marks

In common with the practice of medieval guilds, marks were used to identify a craftsman's work in order to discover makers of inferior products. Much later, this was to evolve into a system of 'trade marks' carrying information of quality and good workmanship for the customer (Unwin 1997). Even before the Act of Incorporation in 1624, the Cutlers' Jury of the Manorial Court had a book in which they recorded the names of cutlers with an impression from a mark punch. After 1624, the Searchers' role was to ensure that the marks of Freemen were duly registered, that designs were not too similar to existing ones and that Freemen only used their own mark on their wares. Searchers were entitled to inspect work in order to maintain standards. The system worked only as long as the searches were effective and that penalties were enforced, with the confiscation of falsely marked goods. Protecting the marks from abuse was in the interest of both manufacturer and customer, in order to maintain the reputation of Sheffield products.

The Company's mark books recorded the marks of each group of craftsmen from 1614, and they show stylistic changes over time as, with increased literacy, words and names became more common, but symbols such as hearts, crosses and diamonds continued to be popular, often combined with letters and numbers. With the opportunity to carry overt and covert messages within the mark it is surprising that this so rarely occurred, though the Company did put some restrictions on the use of personal names, and only latterly on the use of words which could imply quality.

The relationship between the London and Sheffield cutlers had always been somewhat prickly, with the Londoners justifiably annoyed at Sheffield cutlers trying to capitalise on their position as makers of quality

cutlery. Between 1614 and 1814, 25 Sheffield craftsmen registered marks which included the word 'LONDON', with or without other words such as 'IN' or 'CITY', or with symbols such as a cross. All but five were for cutlers and belong to the period 1708 to 1772, with more being registered in the 1730s than in other decades. However, as Sheffield's prestige rose with the improving quality of its knife production, the registering of another place-name tended to backfire. The last person to register the mark with the word 'LONDON' was Samuel Lindley in 1772 (Fig 3). In September 1786 he went to the Company and complained against David Hinchsliffe and partners, scissormiths, for striking a mark that had not been assigned to him, namely 'Golden London', on razor blades found at Royds Mill Wheel. Hinchsliffe admitted it, but said that others did the same. (CC, C9/2)

As Sheffield's reputation rose, it began to suffer from the same abuse as it had practised on the London cutlers—namely other people, including those abroad, began using marks similar to those registered in Sheffield. Obviously, symbols such as crosses, hearts and stars are generic, but examples can be found from Solingen, Germany, one of which attempted to confuse customers by registering the mark 'CHIFFILD (Schlesinger 1982, 35). In another case the mark 'PATEN' was registered in Solingen (Fig 4), and this name also appears on the

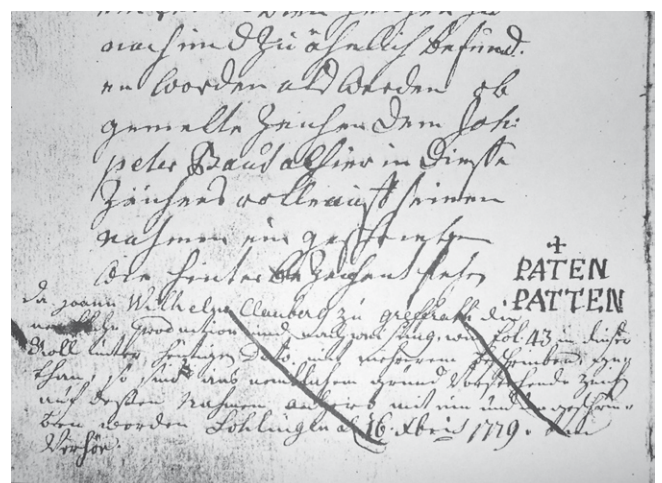


Figure 4: The mark of a cross and 'PATEN' was registered by Johann Peter Baus of Solingen-Grafrath in 1772 (Solingen Stadtarchiv H24, 55).

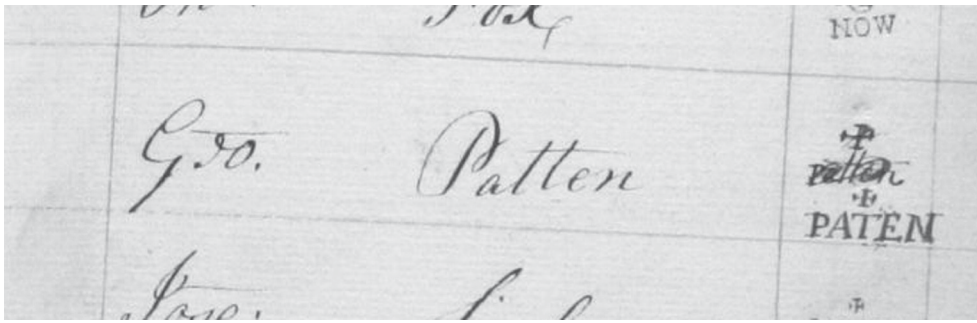


Figure 5: The same mark of a cross and 'PATEN', was registered by George Patten of Coalpit Lane in 1737 and by his son in 1791 (CC LI-7-1).

marks touchplate in the Cutlery Museum in Thiers, France. The Patten family were noted pocket knife cutlers in Sheffield in the second half of the 18th century (Fig 5).

This discussion on marks emphasises the importance for manufacturers of being able to identify their goods and feel secure from fraudulent marking, but this depended on vigilance and a system of control, searching and penalties. This became impossible for the Cutlers' Company once international trade expanded late in the 18th century, when many of the 'copied' Sheffield marks were intended for foreign markets. The Company simply did not have the resources to police a world-wide system. In July 1791 a notice appeared in *The Sheffield Advertiser*, announcing the formation of 'The Society for the Preservation of Marks', where for a subscription of 6d the Society would support through law anyone who was endangered by improper use of his mark. Since this had been the rôle of the Company, it suggests that the Company was unable or unwilling to enforce its own rules.

Searching for deceitful wares, 1770–814

By the 1770s, craftsmen were increasingly concerned about the casting of iron forks, and the Company's Minute Books detail internal debates during the last few months of 1779 when the Company tried to use its statutory powers to address the problem. There is however no clear evidence in the Minute Books as to when the Company began to concern itself with the activities of forkmakers. While it is assumed that forks were being made by cutlers who had the facilities and skills, it is possible that other metalworkers were making these items outside the Company's jurisdiction which, as forkmakers were not named in the 1624 Act, they were entitled to do. The Company bought knives and forks from unknown suppliers as gifts during the 1680s and 1690s, the earliest named supplier being Jo. Oats (possibly John Oates, Freeman in 1686), who sold the Company two dozen knives and forks, the assumption being that he made them all. The first reference to a 'forkmaker' in the Company records is to Thomas Hill,

described as a cutler/forkmaker, taking an apprentice in 1769. One can well imagine, although without further evidence, that some forkmakers began casting iron forks and this impinged on those cutlers and other forkmakers who were forging from steel. As the practice spread it became necessary for the Company to act, and the fact that they first went for the cast iron forkmakers implies they were the major offenders at the time. However, as the 1624 Act and later by-laws do not mention forkmakers, it is hard to see how the Company could exert its power over this group of craftsmen if it did not have the right under its rules. During the turmoil leading up to the passing of the second Act in 1791, the filesmiths questioned whether they could be strictly described as making items with a cutting edge and would therefore not be bound by the Company's rules. No one seems to have included forkmakers in this argument, but shortly before the Act was passed the Company minutes do record an agreement that the filesmiths and forkmakers could be included in the proposed Act and be subject to the Company's laws, if Parliament approved and if they so wished.

Another issue causing unrest among the membership was the way in which the Company was seen as a self-selecting clique, so the 1791 Act reinforced existing practice by specifying that all master manufacturers who made knives, sickles, shears, scissors, razors, files and forks within Hallamshire and who were Freemen of the Company were to meet on the first Monday in August each year to elect 24 of their number from whom 12 of the Company's Assistants must be chosen. This shows that the Company and the industry in general saw the forkmakers as a distinct craft, but as a sub-group of cutlers, as for example the razormakers were.

On 29 October 1779 the Company resolved that all suspicious places were to be searched for forks made of pig metal (cast iron), and those found guilty of not bringing them to be examined by the Searchers and/or not striking a mark on their wares were to be considered guilty of supplying deceitful wares. The next day the Searchers were twice denied entry when they attempted

to search the warehouse of Thomas and Ebenezer Parker for deceitful wares, but three days later they found 64 cast-metal forks in the Parkers' warehouse. Thomas and Ebenezer Parker were the sons of William Parker, cutler; Thomas becoming a Freeman in 1769 and Ebenezer in 1777. In the 1787 street directory, Ebenezer Parker is listed as a factor and manufacturer of table knives and forks, knives for the African and Quebec trades and dealer in blistered and faggot steels (Gales and Martin 1787.) On 6 November, Thomas Parker was requested to surrender all forks made of pig iron or cast metal but he refused and the Company threatened to prosecute. The Searchers were refused entry to the Parker warehouse three more times and eventually, on Christmas Eve, the brothers appeared at the Cutlers', where Thomas was fined 20 shillings for twice refusing the Searchers entry and Ebenezer fined 30 shillings for refusing them three times. No fine seems to have been imposed for making 'deceitful wares'.

It is clear from the Parker episode that the Company and its rules were being flouted, but this business has to be set in the context of the turbulent times of the 1770s and 1780s. The matter of the 'deceitful wares' was just another crisis facing the Company. Serious challenges to its authority were coming from groups of Freemen who questioned many of the bye-laws that had evolved over the decades, as it was generally felt that the Company's rules did not reflect the changing economic climate. However, on 31 July 1780, it again tried to resolve the matter by imposing a heavy fine on anyone making or selling cast-iron blades and forks. The new bye-law stated that:

'...cutlers have made blades of steel properly forged or hammered, and tempered, of the best edge, and of great Strength spring and elasticity, whereby they have gained great reputation... but now some cutlers are making blades for forks of cast or pig iron alone or mixed with wrought or forged iron or steel in moulds. These have not the strength, spring or elasticity but are dressed and polished to resemble forged and hammered steel. It is ordered that no-one using the said Mistery or Craft of making Knives Blades or Forks... shall cause to be made or sell or Expose to Sale, any Blade or Blades, of or for any Knife or Knives, Fork or Forks, made of Cast or Pig Iron either alone or Intermixed with Wrought or Forged Iron or Steel, by Melting and Casting or running the same into any Mould or Moulds...' (CC, C9/1)

The fine was a remarkable ten shillings per blade. The Company also decreed that it would be lawful for the Searchers to enter any Freeman's premises, at any time

of the day, to search for deceitful or unworkmanlike wares. Any such wares would be taken away and destroyed, with the steel and iron sold for the benefit of the poor. This was not an idle threat, as three years later, on 13 May 1783, Benjamin Broomhead accused Richard Kent of supplying him with eight and a half dozen (102) cast-metal fork blades. These were produced and Richard Kent paid the penalty of ten shillings per blade, amounting to £51. However, he claimed to be ignorant of the bye-law and asked for some of the fine to be returned. The Company adjourned to consider this, and six weeks later voted by 21 to 8 to return £41.

However, this case did not change anything, and matters continued to simmer for years as the Company struggled with growing internal conflicts which resulted in a new Act of Parliament in 1791, sweeping away some of the restrictive rules relating to apprenticeships and freedoms, but still including the stipulation that blades should have an edge of steel. Throughout the 1790s meetings of manufacturers were held in the town, and the newspapers reported their growing frustration as they addressed courteous letters to the Company begging for some action to be taken over cast-iron cutlery. The Company continued to discuss ways of suppressing the practice of making blades from cast iron and in October 1800 it decided that it would not be advisable to prohibit the manufacture of cast-iron cutlery, because it could only prevent manufacture within Hallamshire, and such goods would continue to be made elsewhere. In truth, there was very little which the Company could do as its remit extended only over Hallamshire, but it could have spoken out more forcefully. The Company did go on to promise support for any Act of Parliament restricting the manufacture of cast-iron cutlery and insisting that manufacturers of such goods mark them as 'cast iron' before they were sold. But so long as there was a market for such goods, this half-hearted approach was unlikely to have much effect. (Lloyd 1968 reprint, 142)

Legislation to regulate the cutlery trades in England, 1819

During the first two decades of the 19th century it was clear that it would be impossible to prevent the manufacture of cast-iron cutlery, and efforts focused on unequivocal identification of such goods and the prevention of fraudulent marking. In 1819 the Act to Regulate the Cutlery Trades in England (59 Geo. III, c-7) was concerned with the two issues facing the Company—the manufacture of cast-iron wares and the false marking of any goods in a design which suggested quality. The Company had not promoted this Act, but local opinion



Figure 6: Razor, with the mark (enlarged: inset) of seven stars, registered by George Johnson in 1832. The hammer denotes that it is hand forged. Length 160mm overall (CC no. 050454).

can be traced in the newspapers and especially in the diaries of Thomas Asline Ward (Bell and Leader 1909). Thomas was born in Sheffield and was trained as a cutler by his father Joseph, becoming a Freeman in 1802. He was Master Cutler in 1816 and, with a small number of local men, wanted political reform. Later, in 1832, he was one of four candidates in Sheffield's first election for its own Members of Parliament. He was a popular choice, being declared winner on a show of hands, but the losing candidates demanded a poll and, when Ward lost, rioting followed during which five people died.

In 1818 Ward commented on the cast iron issue in a letter to the Reverend Joseph Hunter and described how several men had been to London soliciting interest in the business of marking cast-iron wares. Ward also wrote that he had been to a committee meeting of the Sheffield Trade Protection Association and of Cast Iron Marking, which was promoting the bill for marking cast-iron goods (Bell and Leader 1909, 250).

The 1819 Act was initially intended to prevent the marking of cast-iron goods with any kind of mark, but the House of Lords decided that the clause in the Act which specified that the mark of a 'hammer' be used to identify traditionally-forged blades (Fig 6) would sufficiently protect consumers. It would be an offence to mark goods with any false description of quality and it would seem that legal efforts were moving towards the correct marking of such goods, rather than the prohibition of their manufacture.

The case against the manufacture of cast-iron goods, 1843

There is little evidence that the situation improved during the 1820s and 1830s as in 1827 the Company issued a notice warning people of the consequences of mark-

ing goods as being made of steel when they were not (Leader 1905, 120). But there were other aspects to this matter of casting iron blades. In 1842, G Calvert Holland gave a paper to Sheffield's Literary and Philosophical Society entitled *An Enquiry into the Condition of Cutlery Manufacture*. Holland, the son of a barber, was educated in Sheffield, London and abroad, returning home to be elected physician at the General Infirmary. In his presentation on cast-iron cutlery Holland explained that honest craftsmen of Sheffield were hardly able to make a living wage, and highlighted as problems the introduction of machinery and the fact that many manufacturers were becoming no more than factors. Holland showed examples of cast-iron knives, scissors and razors, as part of his argument. He was able to provide figures of production, but admitted that he had met with evasions and denials by manufacturers. He said that knives, razors, scissors and forks were being made of cast iron and, as such, were worthless, but that many of these blades had been highly finished and given quality handles of ivory, as were the best steel knives. He compared the production of goods in cast iron and in forged steel saying that one man and a boy could make 100 gross (14400) of cast scissors each week and 10 men and 10 boys could cast 1000 gross (144000) forks each week. He said it would have taken 250 men and 250 boys to forge the same number of forks. A similar situation existed in grinding where cast blades were ground at 24 dozen (288) a day, whereas forged blades could only be ground at the rate of six dozen (72) a day.

Much of his argument was intended to show the reduction in employment, not only in the cutlery trades. For instance, if 1000 gross of forks were forged from steel per week, he argued that it would have required 325 tons of steel per year, giving employment to the iron manufacturers, steel converters and steel rollers. Added to these numbers were the hundreds of men and boys who would have been employed in forging a similar number of forks. He said that previously there were some 450 men forging steel and 'steel-lined' blades, but that at the present time, the number had fallen to 180. In displaying examples of cast-iron cutlery Holland was not only expressing anger at so many men being put out of work, but that these spurious goods would show little profit, unless they were being sold for something they were not, thereby ruining the reputation of Sheffield manufacturers.

A year later, the Company at last exerted itself in spectacular fashion by bringing a court case against two manufacturers, Samuel Naylor and William Sanderson. In August 1843 *The Sheffield Iris* ran a jubilant editorial on the seizure of metal goods which were brought be-

fore the authorities. 'They [The Cutlers' Company] have discharged a duty which has hitherto been neglected—they have done that which we hope will tend to stay the manufacture of spurious goods marked as 'Shear Steel' or 'Cast Steel' which are nothing less than cast metal.' The facts of the case were that a man called John Shaw had informed against Samuel Naylor and William Sanderson, saying that they had knives made of cast iron, but marked 'cast steel' and 'shear steel'. The case was brought by Wilson Overend, a solicitor, and was based on the 1819 Act, that goods were not to be marked as something they were not. Not only was it remarkable that the Company had become involved in a court case over a matter which should have concerned it for decades, but many column-inches in the local press drew attention to the endemic nature of the 'cast iron' scandal.

The case against Samuel Naylor was that the Constable had removed six gross and five dozen (924) table knives which the Master Cutler, William Broadhurst, declared in court to be made of 'pot metal as used for fire stoves' even though they were marked 'shear steel'. Naylor pleaded ignorance, and in his defence he said that they were the first he had ever made; that he had bought them from another manufacturer; did not know about the Act; that he had received the order from a foreigner and that they were to go abroad. When Mr Henry Walker, Justice of the Peace, said that such practices would ruin Sheffield, Naylor replied that it had been a practice for 20 to 50 years and was being done every day by many people.

Naylor had received an order for the knives and he had instructed Sanderson to make them. In evidence an invoice showed that the knives were described as 'cast blades' and Naylor claimed that he made no more profit on them than if they were genuine steel. He said he was sorry, but claimed that many Sheffield blades, which were correctly marked 'shear steel', were not one bit better than those he had made. He said the goods were intended for export to the American Indians and that the invoice from Sanderson described the blades as 'cast *spear* points' not 'cast *shear*'—whatever that might mean.

In William Sanderson's warehouse, the Constable found sailors' and pocket knives which, even though they were marked 'shear steel', the Master Cutler declared to be of cast metal. Sanderson said in his defence that he was sorry and that it was the first time he had made them, having only recently come into the trade. However, his warehouse held another lot of blades, 42 gross and 4 dozen (6,096), which the Master Cutler also declared were not made of shear steel.

The magistrates took a serious view and said the penalty

for such cases was a fine of £5 per dozen blades. Edward Vickers, magistrate, acknowledged that he personally knew Naylor and that even though false marking was a serious offence and even though the Act was 25 years old, this was the first case to be brought. He said the fine would ruin Sanderson. Henry Walker, another of the magistrates on the bench, had asked what the difference in prices was, and was told that it cost £4 19s 6d to cast a gross of blades, which if forged would cost £16. Walker then pointed out that although the penalty was hard on Sanderson, they had to consider the trade of Sheffield. Vickers replied that there were thousands of similar instances.

In summing up the magistrates said that although it would be very hard on Naylor and Sanderson, the verdict had to be for the good of the trade. Naylor was fined £417 10s 0d and Sanderson a staggering £1,395. Their offence was not *making* cast-iron knives, but *marking* them as shear steel, which the magistrates said was a serious crime and that they were powerless to reduce the fine. The Master Cutler was to arrange for the destruction of the knives, which was done in a carnival atmosphere in Paradise Square in Sheffield town centre. According to a description of the occasion, the knives were brought on a cart, through cheering crowds, and after a few words by the Master Cutler, men set about smashing the blades with hammers on anvils. Everyone present expressed themselves pleased with the outcome, a public demonstration of the need to prevent such abuse. According to the Act, the fines should have been divided up, with one third going to the poor of the parish and two thirds to the informant. Whatever the magistrates had said, it seems that the fines were reduced, as the Overseer of the Poor received just short of £34 in total, after legal expenses were deducted (Leader 1905, 120). It is not known how much, if anything, the informant, John Shaw, received.

Conclusion

In 1624, the Cutlers' Company in Hallamshire was given a mandate to control important elements of the local cutlery trades, some of which related to the quality of the goods being produced. While the trained craftsmen did not have to produce a 'masterpiece' to prove their skill, it is evident from the wording of the Act that one criterion of quality would be enforced, and largely continued to be taken seriously: the Company's six Searchers would make certain that all blades had an edge of steel and, to do this, they were to ensure that goods could be inspected and that all producers had an identifying mark. They were also legally entitled to impose fines. The maintenance of

the Cutlers' Company mark books shows how the idea of a simple identifying mark for manufacturers could evolve into a guarantee of quality for customers with the attendant benefit of increased sales. As the quality of the Sheffield cutlery improved the craftsmen no longer had to simulate the marks of London, but then were themselves increasingly the victims of foreigners imitating successful Sheffield marks.

Having established the tradition that Sheffield manufacturers produced goods of a reliable quality, the Cutlers' Company realised it was vital to maintain this reputation and to ensure that customers were not deceived. There would always be those who cut corners to reduce their production costs, and an easy option was to use cheaper materials. Because of the relative costs of steel over iron and the cost of forging over casting, it was to be expected that casting blades out of iron would become an attractive alternative. It seems to have begun with the casting of forks but then spread to table blades, scissors and razors, producing articles widely acknowledged as inferior. The initial outrage was over the deception of customers, as much as the undercutting of the prices of honest craftsmen, with the reputation of all Sheffield makers likely to suffer. The deception was exacerbated by 'false marking'—the stamping of words to imply quality, which brought into question the whole system of monitoring the marks of Sheffield craftsmen by the Company Searchers.

The two elements—the manufacture of good quality goods through costly production methods and the increasing reliance on an identifiable marking system—came together with the scandal of the cast-iron cutlery manufacture at the end of the 18th century. Although these problems faced the Cutlers' Company at a time when it was fighting for survival, it did not take the initiative as it should have done. When eventually it did exert itself, in 1843, it did so in a very public manner which seems to have served to expose the scale of the manufacture of cast-iron blades. The Company's internal records are almost silent on the affair, but lessons were learned: by the end of the 19th century, after it had become a Sub-Registry for the Trade Mark Act, the Cutlers' Company took its role seriously and worked hard on the national and international stage in protecting its registered trademarks and defending the good name of Sheffield—which continues to the present day.

Acknowledgement

My thanks to the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire for permission to use images of items from its collections.

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