

A Cooper's cast iron Jointer Plane

By Neil Searle

A recent TradeMe auction listed an "Antique 1830mm Long, Wood Planer by John Fearn Ltd" The auction went on to describe the plane as having a missing front knob! At 50kg, I don't think many of us would be able to plane or to dress timber as they believed it was handled. Of course, cast iron bi-pod legs would have fitted the receptacle at the front of the plane; these were generally 18" from the floor.



Fig. 1. The auction, Jointer made by John Fearn Ltd., Sheffield. The weight and stability of the cast iron jointer would have been a huge improvement over the lighter wooden jointers of the same length. Some wooden jointers were made to be taken apart; these were used by travelling Coopers whereas the cast iron jointer would be permanently in a cooperage. Other Cooper planes included a double-mouth wooden jointer that had two irons. The plane sold for \$380, apparently the plane was missing the legs.



Fig. 2. The hole would have mated with a cast iron stand for elevation. The evolution of iron Coopers jointers did not supersede the wooden jointer as modern technology made the cast iron jointer redundant very quickly.



Fig. 3. Number 293..... how many were made? I have never seen another.

From the Sheffield Libraries and Archives:

John Fearn Limited (later Sheffield Cooperage Limited) Malleable Iron founders and Cutlery Casters
Corn Hill and Leicester Street Foundry, Leicester Street, Sheffield.

- Ledgers, trademarks, specifications, deeds, etc., 1815 - 1967 (Sheffield City Archives: MD6862-6870)
- Coopers' tools and sundries, [? 19th- 20th cent] (Sheffield Local Studies Library: 674.82 SST)
- Cabinet and cases of cutlery and plate catalogue.



Fig. 4. Massive 3" Width Tapered Cutting Iron - J. Fearn, Sheffield and 10 inches long.

Many irons have been found as new old stock in various Hardware and Ironmonger stores in the UK, consequently surface on eBay. This example happens to be for sale from mjdtools (Martin Donnelly) in the USA for US \$124.50.





Fig. 5. Briggs: Burton-on-Trent, a town made famous by its breweries, there were around a hundred breweries in Sheffield in the late 1890s. The plane is shown with cast iron bi-pod legs. The cutting iron in this example is made by Fearn's.

Briggs of Burton is a company that specializes in engineering and manufacturing for the brewing, distilling, food, and pharmaceutical industries. The company's history dates back to 1732 and is headquartered in Burton-on-Trent, UK.

BRIGGS..... Samuel Briggs began working for Thomas Bindley (Ironmongers and Coppersmiths) in 1865 at the age of 16. After marrying Thomas Bindley's daughter Elizabeth in 1872, Thomas Bindley and Samuel Briggs formed Bindley & Briggs. In 1875, the partnership established the Burton Copper Works on Station Street, Burton. Following Thomas Bindley's death in 1880, the company was renamed S Briggs & Co.

The original company began in 1732 as edge tool makers and then initially producing items like hoop iron for local breweries. The company eventually expanded to manufacture steam engines and brewing equipment.

Ref: Cooperstoolmuseum.com. eBay. Sheffield Libraries & Archives. Mjdtools.