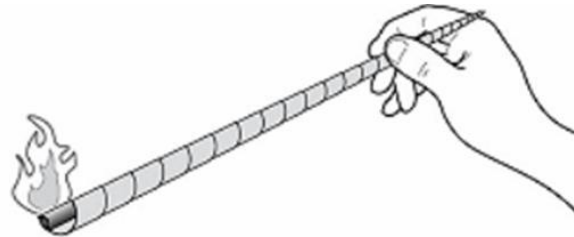


# Spelk Plane

By Neil Searle

Firstly a brief mention about the more common **spill plane**. The spill was often ignited from the fireplace or a candle and used to light other candles, lanterns around the house, or even your pipe. There were two types of spill plane, one that is fixed/clamped to a bench, the hand held wood passed over the plane or more commonly at the time in the form of a hand plane as shown in Fig.1.

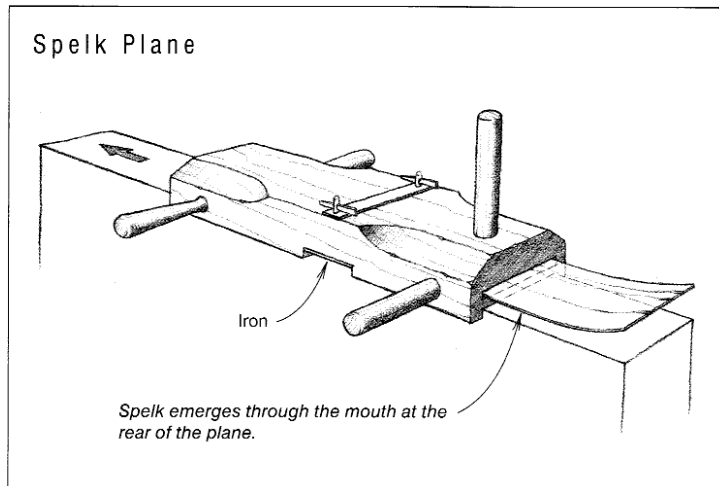


**Fig.1. A modern spill plane.** The shavings were called spill, tapers or squirrels. The shaving of both the spill plane and spelk plane is the end product. Bunches of spills were wrapped in a wood shaving and sold as fire lighters at markets in Early Modern Era times. Often woods with an interesting grain were chosen so to make the spills for sale more appealing.

**Spelk:** (Northern English and Scotland) used from the 1400s. A splinter or sliver of wood. Also called swill. Dialect Scot and Northern English a splinter of wood....

Spelk, like sneck, is another word it's easy to presume is used everywhere, but in fact it's all but unique to Scotland and the North of England. Although just like sneck, spelk is another of the oldest words on this list: it was used in the Old English period to mean a splint or a surgical support, and then began to be used to describe smaller strips or planks of wood.

The term swill basket comes from the action of swilling the cockles in water to rinse them. Spelk is a dialect word for a splinter or a splint of wood, they could be called split wood or splint baskets but locally they have always been spelks or swills.



**Fig.2.**

A Spelk plane makes shavings of a certain width and thickness for weaving baskets, bending into small boxes or if they are wide enough, for bending into traditional cheese boxes. Driving the plane over the stock or the stock over the plane takes such force that most planes have a number of handles for additional hands.



**Fig.3.** A very old spelk plane showing the slot where spelt would emerge. It is possible that early spelk planes were made in Scotland as this was very much a Northern England/Scottish occupation at the time. Although the example shown in Fig.3. is most likely Continental in origin.



**Fig.4.** A German Spelk plane made of teak. Age unknown. Called a Box Planer in German. These planes cut a thicker shaving to use for making a basket.



**Fig.5.** The underside of the above spill plane showing the fixed depth cutter.



**Fig.6.** A continental spelk plane with chip-carved decoration, dated 1785, the cutter adjustable for depth and angle by a system of wood screws controlling a tension block on top of the stock --21 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. long, with two cross-handles



**Fig.7.** Basket weavers using spelk or swill believed in this image to be produced with a froe and by hand as shown in Fig.8 & 9.





**Fig.8 & 9.**

Often coppiced green oak was used, usually 20-30 years old and from four to eight inches in diameter, often 8-10 feet long. A froe is used initially to cut the log into quarters called billets. Then a smaller knife (a Bodkin) is used to clean up the spal.

The billets are then boiled in water for several hours which softens the resins allowing for wood fibres to be separated more easily, so then began the tearing or “riving” of them into strips. Taws (the thinner strips) are placed at the bottom of the boiler with the spals above them.

Once dry the spals and taws are dressed and cleaned up using either a draw knife or a bodkin knife.

**Note:** The only other plane that I know of where the shaving is the product of the plane is the leather fillet plane. This plane cut fillets that can be applied to any form of corner whether straight or curved, or no matter how irregular the curve may be.

Ref: The Handplane Book by Garrett Hack. Jim Bode Tools.