The Crafts of Bygone Days

Looking back down the years, to my schooldays and days of my youth, it is with a feeling of regret that the crafts of the village blacksmith and wheelwright, who in conjunction with each other used to ply their trades, are a thing of the past, owing to the tractor and other forms of mechanisation. The wheelwright, whose job it was to build carts, wagons, wheelbarrows, and build wheels of different sizes for the use of the farmers to bring in the hay and corn harvest etc. The blacksmith using his skill for hopping the different wheels which the wheelwright had constructed, also making gate irons, door bands etc, harrows for use in clearing the twitch and rubbish from the fields before drilling and harrowing in the corn, and the continuous task of making horse shoes and shoeing horses.

In the village of Walesby the wheelwright was Mr Mark Whitworth, a man of great talent, whose descendants were all engaged in the joinery business.

Mr Harry Nunn and his son, Charles, were the village blacksmiths who were also very proficient at their trade. As a youth I spent many happy hours watching them forge different things on the anvil.

Mr Whitworth, who lived at the bottom end of the village, would transport or trundle up to the blacksmith's shop the wheels that he had made, and needed iron hoops or tyres to alleviate wear when in contact with the roads. These wheels would then be placed on a wheel stool, and Mr Harry Nunn

or his son, Charles, would measure the circumference with an instrument called a trammel. The measurement would then be transferred to a band of iron which was to form the hoop. After this had been completed and the necessary allowance made for the welding, it would be put through a bending machine, turned by hand to produce the exact circle required. The welding and completion of numerous sizes of hopes would all be sorted out, and arrangements made for the heating of the hoops. Billets of wood previously prepared would then be brought to the site selected for the fire, pieces of stout ironwork would keep the hoops from contact with the earth. The hoops or tyres would then be placed upon the iron strips, bundles of straw would be placed over the hoops and on the top of this the billets of would would be stacked. The straw would be fired and in turn the ironwork became a rosy heated glow. A large table or bed of iron four or five inches thick was used to fasten down the wooden wheels. Spikes of iron which were named pritchels would be driven into the spokes of the wheels at given distances. This was to ensure that the glowing hoops would stay true and at a constant level from the iron bed.

Then the great and crucial task of lifting the hoops from the fire. This was done by special iron bars about six feet long, with a kinked end to fit over the hoops. Usually three or four men would be required for this operation. At a given command and everyone working in unison, the word would be give: "Lifting dogs on. Now altogether lift." The glowing hoop would then be transferred and placed in position over the wooden wheel. At the same time a gang of men already standing by with watering cans and striking hammers waited

for the blacksmith's next command, which would be: "Spikes out!". The spikes holding the hoop level would be knocked out from the wheel, then the men with hammers and watering cans would, as quickly as possible, knock down the hoop over the wheel, and slack down the heated hoop to create contraction and therefore ensure that the hoop, when cooled down, gripped the wheel tightly and without any additional means would then be ready for service.

JW Nunn