

**Object(s):** Saddle Makers Scissors

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### Saddle Makers Scissors

In the Museum collection, there are several objects associated with horse harness and saddle making. This is not altogether surprising given the strong reliance on the horse for farming and transport in East Anglia in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

The Saddle Makers Scissors are part of a large collection of 37 items used by Harness Maker, Charles Robert Wilson who traded in Melton Street, Woodbridge between 1920 and 1953. Other items in this collection include: Whips, Pliers, Saw's, Gauge's, Knife's and Punches; all of which were common tools of the Harness Makers trade. The collection was donated to the Museum in 2007 by Mr R.H. Cousins of Stonham Aspal.

Charles Robert Wilson was born in 1883 and is listed in the 1911 Census, then aged 28, as a Harness Maker living in Witnesham near Ipswich. He learned his trade in Walton, near Felixstowe as an Apprentice to a Mr Gabriel Green. Following a period of service during the First World War, he returned to his chosen profession, finally retiring in 1953, a year before he passed away.<sup>1</sup>

Although living in Witnesham, Charles Wilson was trading from premises in the Street, Melton, Woodbridge. Blake<sup>2</sup>, uses data from White's Trade Directory of 1874, which states that the Melton Saddler and Harness Makers business was then run by a William Hennessy. The same publication also includes an image of Melton Street, which includes the Saddler and Harness Makers premises. A parish survey produced in the 1980's for 'Heritage Suffolk',<sup>3</sup> lists the businesses in Melton in 1912. Among those listed is a 'Saddle/Harness Maker', which suggests that it was this business that Charles Wilson later ran.

The Scissors are 31.5cm long and bear the inscription of the maker 'Arnold and Sons, London.' The image below, is an example of their work. Image: Courtesy of the Science Museum.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> Robert Blake – Melton, a changing village. 1994

<sup>3</sup> <https://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/home> - Suffolk County Archaeological Service 2014-19.



Image 1: Arnold and sons Scissors<sup>4</sup>

### **Arnold and Sons, London**

The company of Arnold was established in 1819 by James Arnold as a chemist and druggist. By 1829, he had diversified the business to include the manufacture of precision surgical instruments. He later became a leading supplier to the Military Medical Service. In 1857 his son joined the business to be followed by a second son in 1866 when the company name formally changed to Arnold and Sons.



Image 2: Example of Arnold and sons WWI Field Surgical Kit By Daderot<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Scissors, angled, steel, by Arnold and Sons of Lon | Science Museum Group Collection [Internet]. Collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk. 2020 [cited 5 March 2020]. Available from: <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co174946/scissors-angled-steel-by-arnold-and-sons-of-lon-scissors>. © The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum

<sup>5</sup> File:UK surgical kit, manufactured by Arnold and Sons, London - National World War I Museum - Kansas City, MO - DSC07662.JPG - Wikimedia Commons [Internet]. Commons.wikimedia.org. 2020 [cited 5 March 2020]. Available from: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=17382233>

During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the business expanded to include the manufacture of Veterinary instruments.<sup>6</sup>

Arnold and Sons eventually ceased trading and was dissolved in 2004.<sup>7</sup>

It is unclear as to why a Harness Maker would have come by and be using 'precision surgical instruments' for the manufacture of harnesses. They would certainly have not been suitable for cutting leather. It is only possible to speculate that perhaps they were used to cut cloth material lining for the inside of horse collars.

### **Harness Making Background**

Carpenter<sup>8</sup> produced an article for the Heritage Crafts Association relating a brief history of Harness Making in Britain.

'Historically there were three separate trades: saddlery, collar making and harness making. There are two types of collars: heavy horse collars and driving collars. However, today the demand dictates that collar making is done as a complete service with harness making. There are more harness makers today than there are collar makers. The collar is the most important part of the harness and must be the correct size and shape for the horse, and the skill lies in making a collar to fit an individual horse.

In the late-nineteenth century there were approximately 3.3 million working horses, and collar making and the other horse-related trades were thriving. However, by 1900 the number of horses had fallen to 1 million, and by 1914 it had fallen to 20-25,000. As the number of horses fell, the market crashed and the horse-related trades fell into rapid decline. Today, the market for driving collars is much bigger than that for heavy horse collars, and England and mainland Europe provide the main market for handmade collars.

Many collars today are using synthetic materials rather than the traditional rye straw, and it is those traditional skills that are endangered'.

### **Harness Making - a local context**

There is little doubt, in spite of the Industrial revolution, Suffolk remained a substantially agricultural and rural economy. Dymond and Northeast<sup>9</sup>, refer to the first farming co-operative 'Assington Co-operative', which allowed 20 agricultural labourers to jointly rent 100 acres of land and provided them with capital and stock. The scheme proved to be highly successful with all of the capital having been repaid in just over ten years. In fact, the Assington Fund (as it is now known) still exists today

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<sup>6</sup> Pamela Hunter. Veterinary Medicine, a Guide to Historical Sources - 2004

<sup>7</sup> <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/people/cp65081/arnold-and-sons>

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Carpenter <https://heritagecrafts.org.uk/collar-making/> - April 2017.

<sup>9</sup> David Dymond and Peter Northeast – A History of Suffolk. 1995.



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and is administered by the Suffolk Agricultural Association, with the aim of supporting younger farmers into the business.

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, mechanisation gradually crept into farming and the role of the horse declined. Nevertheless, most villages had a Harness Maker or Saddler and possibly a Blacksmith. All of which indicates the significant role played by the horse in the economy of that time. Malster<sup>10</sup>, explains that in 1879, there were 130 Saddlers and Harness Makers in Suffolk and, as might be expected, were a regular meeting place for the farming community. He goes on to say that there were 'still more than 80 at work sixty years later.' Malster photographed Mr James Garrod of Lowestoft, who was still trading in the 1950's.

That the Saddler and Harness Making trade was in decline at that time is indicative of the increasing use of mechanical means of farming, which reduced labour costs and improved productivity and profitability for farmers. Aside from his age it is very possible that this was a significant reason why Charles Wilson ceased trading in 1953.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Malster – Suffolk at Work, Trade and Industries. 1996.