

Blacksmithing throughout history

Do you think blacksmiths no longer exist? If you did, you would be totally wrong. This field is experiencing a sort of **renaissance** as people look for a craft with an artistic component that can provide out of the ordinary products. Despite the continuous development of technology, many of today's blacksmiths still work with the tools and techniques that have been used for many centuries.

The early blacksmiths

The first evidence of blacksmithing by hammering iron into shape, is a **dagger** found in Egypt dating from 1350 B.C. Although the dagger was found in Egypt, it was likely the product of a Hittite tradesman. The Hittites • invented forging and tempering, and they kept their ironworking techniques secret. When the Hittites were **scattered**, their ironworking skills spread to Greece and the Balkans. This early Iron Age occurred about 800-500 B.C.

Early smiths likely heated iron in wood fires. They found that wood converted into charcoal •• produced a better fire. Smiths began to specialise in the Middle Ages; a “whitesmith” was someone who worked with lead, a blacksmith was an ironworker, while a **farrier** was a specialist in the making of **horseshoes**. The number of people with the last name of “Smith” in English-speaking countries demonstrates the prevalence of this vocation. Other surnames such as Miller and Cooper have similar origins.

In the 16th century, cast iron came into great use, becoming one of the favourite materials of smiths.

The Hittites were an Anatolian people who played an important role in establishing an empire centered on Hattusa in north-central Anatolia around 1600 BC.

Charcoal is a lightweight black carbon residue produced by strongly heating wood or other animal and plant materials.



Funerary stele of a blacksmith

Blacksmiths today


Some of today's blacksmiths have more sophisticated equipment, but many have chosen to do their job the old-fashioned way. In either case, the **forge** is heated to temperatures of 1000-1500°C using coke and a **blower** to concentrate the air. Steel is usually heated to around 1100°C. The main tools of a smith are still the **anvil**, **tongs** and a hammer.

Today's interest in blacksmithing can be seen in a variety of ways. In the US, smithery is being taught in summer camps as well as in some schools. It is a great opportunity for people to learn this skill so that one of the longest-established crafts known to civilised man can continue to survive the test of time.

anvil: *incudine*
blower: *soffiatore*
dagger: *pugnale*
farrier: *maniscalco*
forge: *fucina*
horseshoe: *ferro di cavallo*
renaissance: *rinascimento*
to scatter: *disperdere*
tong: *tenaglia*


1  Match each word with its right definition.

- | | | |
|---------------|--------------------------|--|
| 1. Whitesmith | <input type="checkbox"/> | a. A ferrous alloy composed of iron and carbon. |
| 2. Dagger | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. A specialist in the making of horseshoes. |
| 3. Horseshoe | <input type="checkbox"/> | c. A specialist working with lead. |
| 4. Tongs | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. A weapon. |
| 5. Farrier | <input type="checkbox"/> | e. A tool used for gripping. |
| 6. Cast iron | <input type="checkbox"/> | f. An arc made of iron nailed to a horse's hoof. |

2  Decide if the statements are true or false. Correct the false statements.

1. Blacksmithing is an ancient profession that does not exist anymore.
2. Today, blacksmiths still work the old-fashioned way.
3. The Ancient Egyptians invented forging and tempering.
4. Early blacksmiths heated iron in wood fires.
5. The early Iron Age occurred about 800-500 BC.
6. The farrier is a smith who works lead.
7. Cast iron has never been worked by blacksmiths.
8. Today, blacksmiths still use an anvil, tongs and a hammer to work.

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3  Look at the picture below and describe it. Use between 60 and 80 words.



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