

THE KENILWORTH HORN COMB INDUSTRY

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After a pre-amble detailing the lack of documentary evidence the correspondent identifies the need to rely on personal recollection, and emphasises the importance of such oral history. He then goes on to explore the various processes involved, fortunately, for us, in some detail. He describes an almost bewildering set of tools of the trade, all with their own names largely unfamiliar to the modern ear. He concludes with information on some of the people and places involved in the trade in Kenilworth

AN OLD KENILWORTH INDUSTRY COMB-MAKING IN BYGONE DAYS INTERESTING PROCESSES DESCRIBED

Various writers on local history make the statement that the making of combs was formerly an industry of importance at Kenilworth, and in most cases that is all they have to say about it. So far as the present writer is aware, no history of this old craft, which once gave Kenilworth a wide reputation and provided the inhabitants of the town with their principal means of livelihood, has yet been published. Opportunities for conducting the research necessary to such a task as that of writing a history of the industry are now becoming few and far between. They consist, almost entirely, of personal reference to the few Kenilworthians to-day who, in some way or another can furnish links with the old industry—recollections of things seen in their younger days or information given to them by some relative of an earlier generation who had been engaged in the industry. Documentary evidence as to the manner in which combs were made at Kenilworth or as to the identity of some of the principal comb-makers must be extremely meagre. It may be possible to find an odd reference here and there, possibly in unsuspected places, and the writer is endeavouring to discover any sources of that kind from which information may be gathered. But the only really fruitful source, it would seem, is that of personal recollection and oral tradition. Fortunately it is still possible to obtain a fairly good general idea of this old industry from these sources, and the writer has endeavoured, by detailed inquiry, to construct a mental picture of this now obsolete, but once important craft; and, in the second place, to set down such facts and impressions as he has been able to gather. It is obvious that a history compiled in this way must have faults. It cannot be as complete as one would wish it be, while the absence of opportunities for actual observation of the various processes involved must count against the attainment of perfect accuracy in describing them. It is quite possible that some who read this history may be in a position to contribute some information which will help to make it more complete or accurate, and the writer of the article will be only too glad to hear of such people.

DATE OF ORIGIN UNKNOWN

The most natural starting point for history of anything or anybody is obviously that at which the person began to live or the thing began to exist. Unfortunately, in this case difficulty arises at the very outset, for although it has been possible to collect a considerable amount of information about the industry, this does not so far include knowledge of when or in what circumstances the industry had its origin. It is much easier to speak of when the old comb-making industry ceased to exist in Kenilworth. It was on its last legs half a century ago, and although one or two of the old hands clung to the trade of their forefathers within the last 40 years, the industry lost its commercial importance at somewhere about the middle of the 19th century. There is every reason to believe that it had had a fairly long career. Those able

to speak with personal knowledge of it nowadays believe that it had been carried on for several generations before they began to know anything of it, but how long back the existence of the industry stretched the writer is not at present able even to suggest. So far as personal recollection of it goes, it is unlikely that anyone now living can lay better claim to knowledge of the subject than Mr. John Spiers, whose father, the late Mr. Andrew Spiers, was engaged in the industry.

It was from Mr. Spiers, who lives on Rosemary Hill, Kenilworth, that the writer was able to obtain much interesting information, and takes this opportunity of acknowledging the fact. Mr. Spiers had often watched the comb-makers work in his young days, and has so clear a recollection of details that he could make combs in the old-fashioned way if possessed with the necessary equipment. But with the departure of the industry the tools and equipment of the workers have also been lost. A few odd specimens still exist in Kenilworth. Mr. Spiers possess one or two of the old simple tools, and it may be possible to find a few more in other houses, but it is unlikely that any complete equipment for the production of hand-made combs is preserved in Kenilworth. As for the combs themselves, they may be described as rare, and it is quite time that some effort was made to collect a representative selection of them to preserve in some local museum or elsewhere as interesting relics of an important period in local industrial history. Mr. Andrew Spiers, the father of the writer's chief informant, worked the trade until about 30 years ago, but by that time the industry had ceased to have any commercial importance. Probably the last comb-making in Kenilworth was done by a man named Edward James, whose habit it was to make a few combs at his home in Kenilworth and then tramp off to Birmingham and sell them.

THE RAW MATERIAL

Horn was the material used most largely in the making of combs at Kenilworth, only a small proportion being of the tortoiseshell variety. Waggon loads of horns, which had in most cases been collected from the slaughter-houses of the large towns, were conveyed to Kenilworth by rail during the later phases of the industry, although it is fair to assume that the industry existed in pre-railway days, and perhaps its earliest stages depended upon local supplies of the raw material. The horns arrived at Kenilworth "in the rough", just in the condition which they had come from the head of the animal, and the entire series of processes between raw material and finished article was carried out here. This does not mean that the whole process was carried out in each workshop engaged in the industry. Simple, almost primitive, as it was, the old comb-making industry illustrated in its own time and manner that principle of division of labour which takes an important place in the study of political economy and had so much to do with what is called "the industrial revolution". It was the industrial revolution that gave the death blow to the old comb-making industry at Kenilworth. In combs, as in countless other classes of goods, the hand-made article has been ousted by the (in many cases) inferior but cheaper machine product. The workers in the Kenilworth industry might be roughly divided into two classes, i.e. "the pressers" and the comb-makers proper. The earlier processes in the making of combs were the particular concern of the pressers, and the actual makers of the combs began their work at the point where the presser left off. Each class, however, had a general knowledge of the work done by the other, and in one or two instances the entire series of processes was carried out within a single establishment. The workmen engaged in the industry did not, as a class, enjoy any great reputation for respectability. They are said to have been a rough set of men, heavy drinkers, quarrelsome, disturbers of the peace generally. In fact, the writer is told that in the days when the comb-making was in full swing in Kenilworth was called "the hell of Warwickshire."

PRELIMINARY PROCESSES

What has been written so far is of the nature of an introduction. Getting down more into detail, a consecutive account of the processes embodied in the industry may be given. When load of horns arrived the premises of a "presser" or comb-maker it was tipped into a yard and subjected to a process of selection carried out by a man thoroughly accustomed to the task and able to pick out the best horns from an assorted lot, and to separate different qualities of the material suited for various classes of work. The highest value was placed upon white horns, as white combs fetched the best prices. At the other end of the scale was the yellow used for the cheapest work only. The mottled horn yielded a comb of the average quality, for which there was the largest demand, and the larger proportion of the horn of a mixed load would be of this type. The term "mottled" is used to describe those gradations of colouring in horn which usually appear slant-wise across a comb, and which correspond more or less to the grain of wood. Only the hollow part of the horn was useful to the comb-maker, and the tips were cut off before the "presser" commenced his task. The tips were sold for use in other industries, and were subsequently fashioned into knife handles and similar articles. The horns most generally used were those of English cattle, but for special orders buffalo horns were used, these producing black combs. The horns, having been sorted and "tipped", were then ready to receive the attentions of the "presser", whose business was to transform them from their natural state into a workable condition.

ROASTING THE HORNS

The function of the presser was a most important one. In the first place, the horns had be roasted order to render them soft and pliable. The fire needed for this operation was one which gave a maximum of flame without too much heat. It was a coal fire, made on a specially constructed fireplace level with the floor of the presser's workshop. The flames leapt high and the horns were held in them until softened sufficiently. This roasting process was usually performed by boys, who roasted two horns at a time. The implement used in this operation was known as the roaster. Its shape was that of a toasting fork with two prongs set two to three inches apart. The roaster would be three feet long or more, so that the user of it should not have to sit too close to the blazing fire. The tool was usually made of iron about half an inch thick, with a round knob or similar device at the handle end. Sometimes the fork part was fitted into a handle of wood. When the fire had been brought to the right condition two horns were slipped on to the prongs of the roaster and were held in the flames. It was necessary to keep the roaster twirling round constantly so that the horns should not be burned. This was one man's or one boy's job, to roast horns all day. In order to relieve the worker from the strain of bearing the weight of the long roaster hour after hour a chain with a hook at the end was suspended from the ceiling, and the long handle of the roaster rested in this hook at its fork end. The other end of the handle was in the hands of the workman or boy, who was easily able to keep it twirling at a fairly rapid speed. The treatment of tortoiseshell was different, this material being softened by boiling instead of roasting. The smell created by these preliminary processes was the reverse of pleasant, but the comb-workers no doubt grew accustomed to hardly notice it. When the industry was at its full prosperity the smell of roasting horns would perhaps pervade Kenilworth at times in the same way as the healthy smell of the tannery often does at the present day. The horns having been softened in the roasting, the next process was split each of them down lengthwise, so that they could be unrolled, as it were, and changed into flat plates, of which the average size was about nine inches square. As soon as the horn came from the fire it was ripped open, bent into an approximately flat shape, and placed between the jaws of a pair of tongs, which held it in shape temporarily until the appliance which did the actual pressing was ready receive it. The tongs used had very long handles and worked on a pivot like a pair of scissors. The lower jaw at the business end of the tool was flat plate

iron approximately the size of the pieces of horn which had to be held. When the tongs were closed the upper jaw pressed the pieces of horn against the flat lower jaw, and in this way they were prevented from curling back into their original shapes. When the horn had been placed in the tongs the workman in charge of this tool usually held it fast not by gripping the handles, but sitting on them; but there was another way of keeping the tongs tightly closed, and that was to slip a piece of iron, bored with holes, on the ends of the two handles, thus preventing them from opening.

COMB-MAKING IN BYGONE DAYS: SECOND ARTICLE

In our article under this heading last week a description was given of the earliest- operations involved in the old comb-making industry—the arrival of the horns, their selection and “tipping”, the roasting of the horns with the aid of a long toasting-fork in the bright fire, the subsequent splitting of the softened horns, and the use of long pair of tongs to hold the flattened pieces horn in shape until they could be pressed. The jaws of these tongs were about a foot long, and another four or five feet for the handles gave the tool a total length of about six feet. When three or four pieces of horn had been placed in the tongs they would be transferred to the pressing block. The pressing-block was important piece of apparatus which generally occupied a central position in the horn-presser’s workshop. It was about a yard long, about a foot wide, and the same measurement in depth. It was an arrangement of iron plates which, placed edgewise, fitted into the pressing-block in the manner of books in a bookcase. These iron plates, which were about three-quarters of an inch thick, were warmed over the workshop fire, while the horns were roasting. Then they were placed in position in the pressing- block, and the pieces of horn which had been roasted, slit, and bent out flat, were removed from the tongs and placed between the warm iron plates, like pieces of toast in a large-sized toast-rack.

THE PRESSING PROCESS

Now came the actual pressing process. At one end of the pressing-block a stout iron wedge fitted into it. The wedge was about two feet six inches long, and in thickness tapered from three or four inches at the top to about an inch at the bottom. The insertion of this wedge had the effect of crushing up together the iron plates of the pressing-block and the pieces of horn between them. But it was not possible to set sufficient pressure without the aid of some driving force to send the wedge as far in as possible. This force was supplied by a curious contrivance which was a primitive application of the principle of the pile-driver or steam hammer. It was called the stamper, and was a great piece of wood several feet long and nine or ten inches square in section. It is fair to assume that this stamper was usually a piece of good old English oak, as weight, strength and durability were needed, qualities which would supplied by oak better than by any other English wood. This heavy “hammer” was raised until it was about five feet above the ground, and then, by the release of a ratchet contrivance at the top end, the heavy weight fell and struck the wedge of the pressing-block. Seven or eight blows with the stamper were required before the wedge was driven the limit to lightness. The process sounds rather primitive, but it was in keeping with other details the methods employed in the industry. There was a small amount machinery employed in the comb-making at Kenilworth, but this was never of considerable extent. The industry was essentially a hand industry, and in many cases the workers in it did their work in their cottage homes, receiving the material from the larger establishments after the fashion of the old-time weavers at Coventry.

THE NEXT STAGE

The pieces of horn were left in the pressing-block until they and the iron plates were cold. Having gradually cooled under pressure, the horn would now remain flat, which was necessary before it was fit for working. By the time that one batch of horns was removed from the pressing-block, another batch, fresh from the roasting, was waiting to be inserted, and so the process was repeated over and over again all day long. The horn came from the pressing-block pieces eight or nine inches square. These had now to be cut in pieces the size of the combs which were to be made. Three or four combs of the average size would thus be yielded by each hour. When the horn had been cut size in this way it passed out of the hands of the presser into that of the comb-maker. The first thing that the latter had was to fashion these somewhat rough pieces more nearly into the shape of combs. The horn would be too thick perhaps, at one edge at least, and it might have bumps or veins standing out upon it. These had to be removed, and the tool employed for this operation was a small chopper. When all the humps and bumps had been cut off, the comb-maker would in most cases find that although the horn was approximately flat, it had a certain twist or curl about it, like the warping of a board of wood. The straightening process required to remedy such defects was rather like the presser's part of the business, but less drastic. The pieces of horn were placed between small pair tongs and held over an ordinary fire until, becoming warm, they could be bent to shape. Then they were placed in the straightening-block. This apparatus had a certain family likeness to the pressing-block, but was constructed of wood instead of iron, and was considerably smaller than the pressing-block, as the horn was now in smaller pieces. The process of straightening was the same in principle as that of pressing. A wedge of wood was fitted in to the end of the straightening block, and was driven home by a mallet. It was not, of course, necessary to use such great force here as the presser employed, as the pieces of horn, by the reduction of their size, had lost much of their former tendency to spring back into their natural shape.

CUTTING THE TEETH

It should be noted this stage that horn was not made up into combs within a few days of being cut from the head of the animal on which it grew. It was seasoned after it had been flattened out, in the same way that wood is seasoned after being cut into planks before it is considered fit for the joiner or cabinet-maker to work upon. Combs made from unseasoned horn would be as unsatisfactory as doors and window-frames constructed, or rather "thrown together," from wood which has not been subjected to the influence of the atmosphere for a sufficient period—a result only too well known to those who have the misfortune to inhabit jerry-built houses. When the horn, well seasoned and cut to shape and size in the manner already described, arrived at the stage when the teeth must be cut, a tool called a "vid" was employed by the comb-maker. The "vid" was a small saw fitted with a gauge, which was set according to the length of teeth required, and which prevented the incision going too far into the back top of the comb. After the vid came the "topper", which was a file of triangular section with teeth on two of its sides. This was used for the rough shaping of the teeth. The teeth had to be provided with two sharp edges, and they had also to be rendered quite smooth, so that the comb would not catch in the hair or tear it. The topper was followed by the "grail," the special function of the latter tool being to sharpen the teeth right down to their junction with the top of the comb. It was this particular operation which gave the Kenilworth hand-made comb a distinctive feature as compared with the machine-made product which succeeded it. In the latter, the teeth often lost their sword-like shape at the top end, and were square in section, just as the first cutting had left them, instead of being shaped as to have two sharp edges in the place of four square corners. This difference may still be observed by a comparison of some modern combs of machine manufacture with the old hand-made combs. The latter were often finished off

more thoroughly, and people who have used both kinds express preference for the old hand-made type. It is interesting to mention that there are least one or two people in Kenilworth who still use regularly hand-made Kenilworth combs. Whilst undergoing the successive processes described above needed for the formation and shaping of the teeth, the comb was held in a contrivance called the "gland". This was a simple form of vice, resembling some of the clamps still used by saddlers. It was not fixed to a bench, but was an independent appliance about 2ft. or 2ft. 6in. in length. The jaws, which were about ten inches long, were two oblong pieces of wood laid flat, one against the other, and held together by a central pin. When the comb was placed in the jaws at one end a wedge was driven in at the other, and so the horn was firmly held while the workman used his tools upon it. The lower jaw of the gland was elongated into a sort of flat-handle, which extended the appliance to the total dimensions mentioned above, and by sitting on this handle or tail, as it might well be called, the workman held the "gland" in position, and had the clamp part of it between his knees.

COMB-MAKING IN BYGONE DAYS: THIRD ARTICLE

Last week's article of this series carried the subject to the point at which the teeth of the comb were cut by the comb-maker, who held the horn between the jaws of the "gland" while he worked upon it with his "vid", "topper" and "grail". The details of the cutting and shaping naturally depended on the kind of comb to be produced. Something will be said later as to the names and characteristics of some of the varieties of combs made at Kenilworth. The ordinary comb for toilet use had about fifteen or sixteen teeth to the inch. A comb with 22 teeth to the inch was a fine comb. For one man to make a dozen combs of the ordinary type was about a day's work. An experienced workman worked so quickly that it would be difficult to follow closely the rapid movement of his hands as he sharpened the teeth. The tool darted in and out between the teeth, never missing its course. Even the fine teeth were very quickly sharpened by the men who were thoroughly accustomed to the work

POLISHING THE COMBS

For polishing, and giving the finishing touch generally to the combs after the teeth had been cut, shaped and sharpened, an appliance having the general appearance of a lathe was used. There were two wheels mounted in this lathe, one being known as the "scouring wheel" and the other called the "buff". The wheels were set spinning round by working a treadle. The "scouring wheel" was covered with a material similar to that of which top hats are made, and was kept in a wet state, the other wheel being dry. Wet charcoal was spread on the scouring wheel, and there was also some black substance, probably dry charcoal, on the other wheel. Before leaving the subject of the processes involved in comb-making, mention may be made of the peculiar kind of seat used by the comb-makers whilst at work. It was called the "bank", and appears to have been a three-legged stool. At one corner of the triangular top was a metal plate with a hole into which various appliances fitted so as to assist the worker in holding his work.

VARIETIES OF COMBS.

It is not necessary describe the ordinary type of comb which formed the bulk of the Kenilworth output. It was the same in general characteristics as the average comb in use at the present day. But several other kinds of combs were made in Kenilworth. At the time when the industry was in the days of its prosperity—say, 70 years ago—combs played an important part in the feminine head-dresses, as may be seen glancing at portraits of the period. The "side combs" to be worn in the hair were amongst the combs made at

Kenilworth. These combs were formed of three or four big teeth with an ornamental top. "Tail combs" was the name given to combs with a handle at one end so that the comb could be held in the same manner as a hair-brush. These were intended more especially for the use of gentlemen, and were narrower than ordinary combs. The latter, by the way, were known within the trade as "deep 2 p's", but what the "2 p's" meant is more than the writer has far been able to discover. Not only were combs for toilet or head-dress use produced at Kenilworth. The stouter class of comb used in grooming horses, and therefore called the mane comb, was also made here. These combs generally had rounded tops, but their shape is so well-known that no detailed description of them is necessary. As has been already mentioned, the best of the horn combs were the white ones. tortoise-shell combs represented a higher degree of luxury, and one of the size of the ordinary comb would be worth about two guineas. Next week's article, which will be the concluding one of this series, will have reference to some of the comb-makers of Kenilworth and the whereabouts of their places of business.

COMB-MAKING IN BYGONE DAYS: CONCLUDING ARTICLE.

Before concluding this series of articles with some notes about the various establishments were engaged in the old comb-making industry Kenilworth, it is necessary to fill in one omission that was made in the description of the processes given in the preceding articles. When the horn had been roughly cut to shape and size after leaving the hands of the presser, the first tool used upon was known as the "stadda". This was a peculiar tool in the form of two saws mounted side by side, the space between them being smaller or larger according to whether it was a fine or a large-toothed comb that was to be made. It was the space between these two saws which settled the thickness of the teeth in the comb. One saw was wider than the other and when the comb-maker used the "stadda", the wider saw cut through the horn to the full depth desired for the length of the teeth, while the narrow saw working alongside it started a "nick" for the next tooth. Then the tool was moved on, the wide saw starting in the nick and completing the cut, while the narrower saw made a start with the next tooth, and so the process was repeated until the required number of teeth were cut. Since writing the earlier articles, the writer has had opportunity of inspecting examples of two of the tools, which have been previously described, namely, the hatchet used in levelling the surfaces of the pieces of comb after they had been cut to size, and the grail, which was a file or rasp used in shaping the teeth after they had been cut by the "stadda". These two old tools, which may now be regarded as rare specimens, are in the possession of Mr. Andrew Spiers, of Rosemary Hill, who, as previously acknowledged, has been good enough to supply the information published in these articles from his personal recollections. It is possible that a few other specimens of the old comb-making tools might be unearthed in some of the cottages of Kenilworth if a close search were made. If even quite a small collection of them could be brought together and preserved it would provide future generations with an interesting link with an important phase in the past history of Kenilworth.

THE COMB-MAKERS.

Mr. Spiers' recollections of the old industry are naturally connected with its declining years, for the industry died out many years ago. He is able, however, to tell of several comb-making establishments which were still in existence at Kenilworth within the period which his memory covers. The largest establishment was Pope's, which was situated in the Square, where the grocery shop of Mr. A. J. Cooke and the wine and spirit store of Messrs. Mander and Co. now stand. One has only to look down the yard of the latter establishment to see the store-room which was formerly the pressing-shop. On the death of Mr. Pope, this

establishment passed into the hands of three of his workmen, Turner, Pace, and Webb, under whose names it continued to exist for some time. This was one of those establishments where the entire series of processes from raw material to finished article were carried out. It ceased operations somewhere about 40 years ago. Another of the leading workshops belonged to the Littleton family, which is still represented in Kenilworth. The premises were situated in High Street, where Lyth House now stands, the workshop being at the rear. An old man named Dunn had his workshop in what is now School Lane. Before the erection of the schools in 1860 this lane was known by a name no less romantic in its sound than "Pepper Alley". Mr. Bunn's workshop was situated close to the schools and continued to exist for some time after the latter were erected, although it was then in decline. Mr. Andrew Spiers, the writer's informant, lived close by, and in his youthful days often went into Dunn's workshop to watch the comb-makers at work. It is chiefly as the result of his observations at that period that it is possible to publish this account of the old industry.

NAMES AND NICK-NAMES.

Nearly all of the comb-makers had nick-names and were more frequently called by these rather than their proper names. "Old Duggins" was the name conferred his contemporaries upon a named Drury, whose workshop was in Albion Street close to where the butcher's shop of Mr. Preece now stands. When the glory of comb-making had departed and those engaged the industry were obliged to seek other means of earning a living, Mr. Drury became town crier and also sold newspapers. As a comb-maker he had had three or four men working for him. A member of his family still lives in Albion Street. "Napper" Tandy was another well-known comb-maker. Before the time at which Mr. Spiers' recollections commence a Mr. Tandy and a Mr. Boddington, two Kenilworth men, went to Sheffield and set in business there in partnership as comb-makers. They made combs by machinery, but sent them to Kenilworth to be finished off. They arrived here in large cases containing, perhaps, as many as 20 gross of combs. Tandy, a relative of the man who went to Sheffield, had a workshop in High Street, at the back of where Mrs. Sheepy now lives. There were several other comb-making establishments in Kenilworth even as late as 50 years ago, but mention has been made of the principal ones, in which the master had other men working for them. There were other comb-makers makers who worked in their own houses, making a few combs and then going off to market to sell them, disposing of them to small shopkeepers.

THE ORIGIN OF COMBS

If one digression from the main subject may be permitted by way conclusion, it is interesting to consider what was the probable origin of that now familiar article, the comb. Many articles and appliances now used by man are the result development from natural forms. For instance the wheel can be traced back to the log. What was the origin of the comb? When the writer came to think about this, the theory which struck him as being the most likely was that primitive man or (more likely still!) primitive woman, finding tangled hair an inconvenience, improved matters by running the fingers through the hair, as some people still do on some occasions. But the fingers were too thick for separating the fine hairs of the human head, and the comb, which may likened to hand with many fine fingers, was invented, in crude form first, and gradually developed until its present form was reached. Whether there is anything in this theory or not, the comb is an article of great antiquity and well worthy of specialised, study.

COMB MAKING: A VANISHED KENILWORTH INDUSTRY - ANCIENT PROCESS DESCRIBED
By Dr. Wyatt Wingrave

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WHEN Sir Walter Scott visited Kenilworth (if he ever did) in search of local colour while preparing his book, "Kenilworth", he must have been too much impressed by the fascination of the Castle to the exclusion of local industry, for at that time Kenilworth combs were as well known as "Coventry Blue." Yet the industry steadily declined, for in the Warwickshire Directory (1876) only three comb makers and one horn dealer are mentioned—in 1900 it was dead.

During the early sixties, the writer lodged at the old malt house, in Malthouse Lane, with its lovely garden and extensive orchard. At the extremity of this orchard there was a horn factory, where he saw much and smelled more. He watched the whole process of preparing the horn for market. Periodically the horns arrived in wagons and were sorted into heaps and cored by striking on a sharp iron. This removed the bony "cores". The straight and sound ones were then cut up by circular saw. Tips were ready for knife and fork handles, the next part for drinking cups, and the wider parts were destined for combs. But in early times they were used as window panes, and even as schoolbooks—the old "hornbook". The thicker parts were then sawn in two longitudinally and after stewing or soaking, were pressed flat, dried, and tied up into bundles ready for the factor who retailed them to the comb-makers for home work, for like weaving at Coventry, lace-making in Devon, and net-making in Dorset. It was essentially a home industry, unlike fellmongering and bark-tanning, which occupied the tall chimney in Kenilworth for so many years, but was killed also by the more rapid, but less durable, process—chrome tanning

MAKING THE COMBS

How were the combs made? The writer's curiosity was set at rest during the nineties while visiting Kenilworth with a cycling party from London. Many inquiries were made in vain as to comb making. It had entirely ceased, but an old man still lived up Castle End way who might help! This courteous old gentleman was found off Castle End. "If you want to see how combs were made, please sit down for a few minutes and I'll show you. I only make one now and then, but I've got all my tools still", he said. Opening a kind of sofa, which served also as "larder", he produced a flat piece of horn, with a saw and a few other tools. The horn was firmly secured in a primitive vice consisting of two pieces of wood hinged at one end by leather and clamped by two screws. This he placed between his knees and with a saw cut the teeth. He then proceeded to "knock off the ugly" with rasp and knife, reducing it to a rough comb, which was finished by files and sandpaper. "There is the comb, a bit rough, not so smooth as if I had taken time to finish it, but it is a good comb!" It was a good one, indeed, perhaps the last one made in Kenilworth.

SUPPLANTED BY MACHINE GOODS

Hand-made combs have been entirely supplanted by machine-made goods in vulcanite, celluloid, and in various colours and composition. A few may still be found which were used for stabling purposes, The horn nowadays supplies a totally different purpose, viz., destruction. From horn is produced picric acid, a potent explosive and a valuable stain for microscopic purposes, and indispensable in many forms of surgery. There are doubtless many people in Kenilworth who do not know that the town had an industry of its own. It is pleasant to think of the Kenilworth of our boyhood, when the Castle was an open playground and its ivy could be climbed for nests; when the roads were not tarmac; when the delicate aromatics of the tanyard prevailed; and when combs were still in the making. Does anyone possess a real Kenilworth comb?