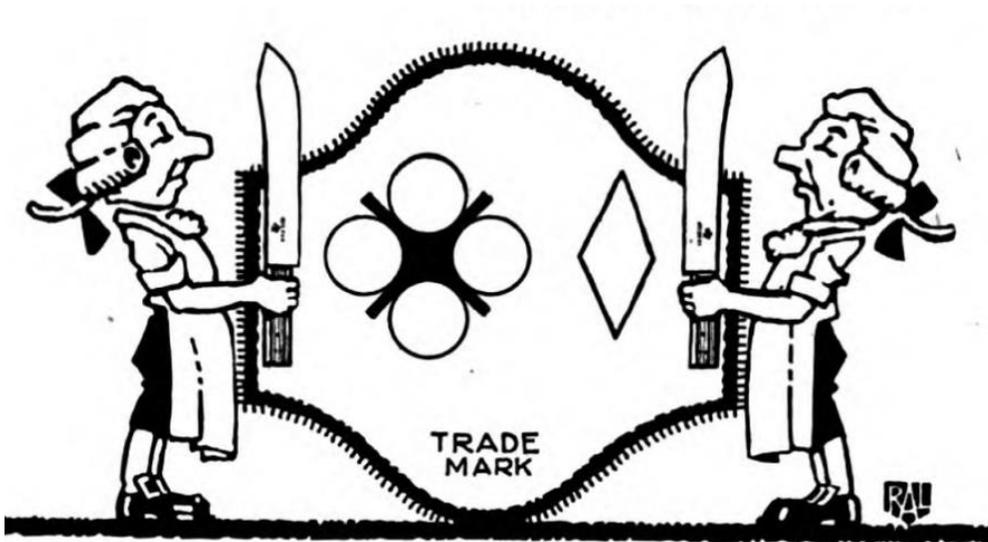


Four Peppercorns and a Diamond



By: Sebastian Scheler

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Front page illustration: Part of a Wilson advertisement from 1920 from Butcher's advocate Vol.70, No. 3.

Introduction

If you had to pick one brand associated with the Rocky Mountain trapper of the early 1800's, which would it be? Hawken? Green River Works? Standish? Does Henry or Grimsley come to mind? Four peppercorns and a diamond? Did you think of that?

As the title reveals, the following pages focus on the last of these brands. Two small symbols that were stamped into the knife blades produced by a Sheffield - England based cutler named John Wilson.

Wilson's knives, or butcher knives to be specific, was the knife of the mountain man if there ever was one.

Although discussing the subject briefly, the ambition of this study is not to further establish the Wilson knife as the trapper's choice. Cited works by Charles E. Hansson, Dr. James A. Hansson and Rex A. Norman, just to mention a few, have done this already. Instead, focus lies on the firm, it's various marks, the family behind the brand and the Sheffield knife industry they were a part of.

I hope this will be of interest to others sharing my obsession.

-Sebastian "Char" Scheler



Butcher knife marked I. WILSON above "four peppercorns and a diamond" made by John Wilson. 6 ½ inch blade. Author's collection.

Trade knives

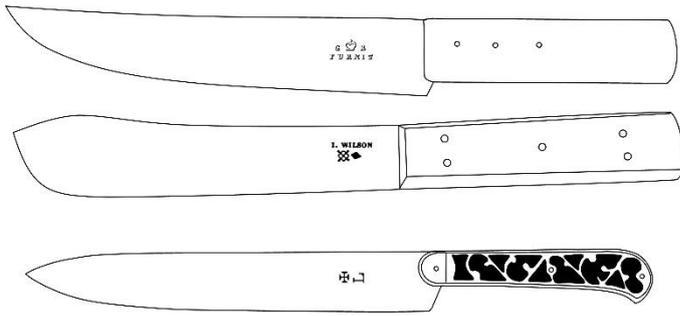


Illustration of early 1800's trade knife patterns. From the top: scalper, butcher & cartouche pattern.

Hansson the most common style was the scalping knife or “scalper”, followed by the butcher knife and lastly the cartouche knife or case knife as it was also known¹. By then a majority of these trade knives were made in Sheffield, England.

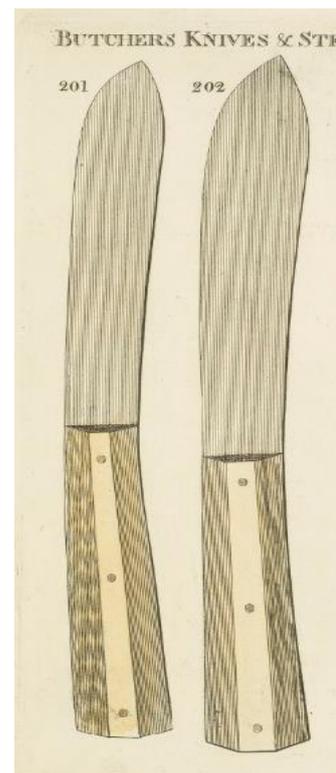
A few of these Sheffield makers supplied more knives to the fur trade than others. The firm of John Wilson, ...*manufacturer of shoe & butchers' knives, and steels...* operating out of Sycamore street was one of those makers.² Although producing a variety of knife patterns, it was the butcher knife that became synonymous with the family name.

Butcher knives vs. Wilson knives

The butcher knife was not just popular among trappers and Indians. By the middle of the 19th century it had become *a universal frontier favorite*. The pattern that developed in the early 1800's has remained more or less untouched since then.³

There were several Sheffield firms making and selling butcher knives to the fur companies, and Wilson's, even though standing for the majority, was not the only brand being traded. William Greaves and Sons, Thomas & John Tillotson and Hiram Cutler (example pictured below) are just a few others, who's butcher knives went west.⁴ No surviving Greaves or Tillotson butcher has been found for this study.

It appears however, like Wilson managed to create a brand so famous it separated him from his competition. The fact that Wilson is mentioned by name in the trade goods lists in a manner similar to how other products are named by quality shows how his name was synonymous with his product. Other cutlers made butcher knives, Wilson made Wilson knives. Another sign of Wilson's popularity in the fur trade comes from 1832 when the AFC ordered butcher knives from



The butcher pattern 1816.
Source: *Explanation or key, to the various manufactories of Sheffield, with engravings of each article*

¹ Hanson, James. *Fur Trade Cutlery Sketchbook*. p.14

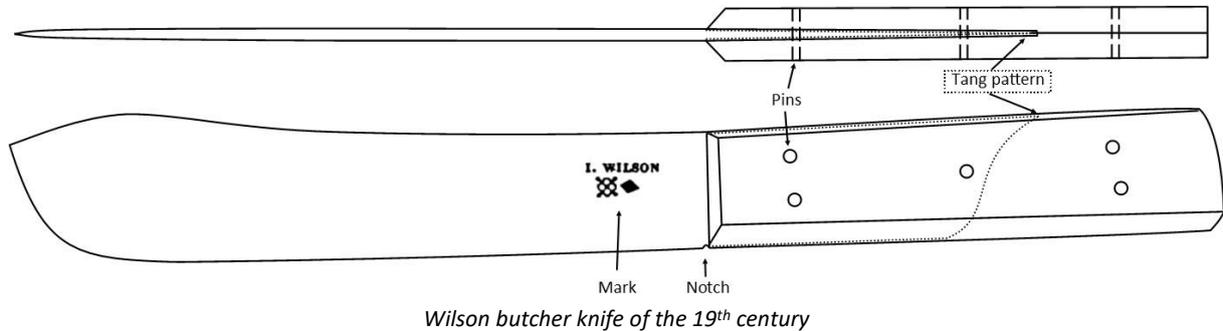
² Baines, Edward. *History, Directory & Gazetteer of Yorkshire, Vol. I: West Riding*, p.351

³ Hanson, Charles. *The MFT Quarterly*. Vol. 23, No.3 (1987): 1-4

⁴ Hanson, Charles. *The MFT Quarterly*. Vol. 23, No.3 (1987): 1-4

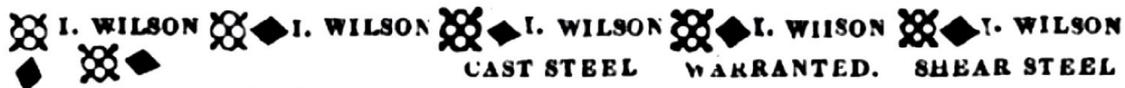
the already mentioned Greaves ... *to be in every respect similar to Wilsons of Sheffield.*⁵

Based on surviving knives from this period (key to early marks is found further down), the Wilson butcher knife produced during the 1800's has a few design features worth mentioning. If any of these were unique for Wilson's knives from the period is hard to say.



The blades were forged with a tapered partial tang. On some knives there is a small notch cut into the blade where a choil normally would be found on later Wilson butchers. This notch was possibly used as a mark for the grinder to start shaping the edge. Two wooden slabs are attached to the tang using iron pins as opposed to rivets. Smaller knives with blades shorter than 7" normally have five pins, while larger knives have six.⁶

**WILSON'S MARK. FOUR PEPPER CORNS AND A DIAMOND, STRUCK UPON THE
BLADES IN ONE OF THE FORMS FOLLOWING :**



Excerpt from Butlers' commercial list from 1832

In 1832 Wilson gets his own section in a catalog of sorts named *Butlers' commercial list*, which has the benefit of listing some, possibly all varieties of Wilson's edged tools that were available in England at the time. Steel qualities, sizes and handle materials are just a few of the interesting details published.

Focusing on Wilson's butchers in the list, they were available in unspecified quality (standard?), cast steel or in warranted quality with 5, 5 ¼, 5 ½, 6 and 6 ½ inch blades. Handle options were unspecified



A rare example of a butcher or possibly worn scalping knife from Hiram Cutler, one of John Wilson's Sheffield competitors in the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade. Courtesy George Korhel

⁵ Ibid.

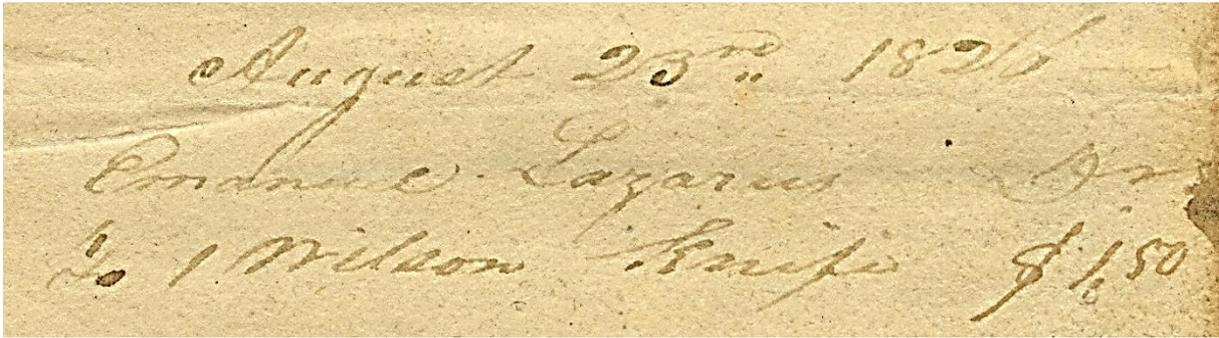
⁶ Gordon. *Great Knife Makers for the Early West*, pp. 44-62

wood (likely beech), box wood and a fancier version with *BUCK HANDLES, SCALE TANG, CAPPED*.⁷ No examples of the fancier types have been found for this study. The issue 33:4 of *Museum of the Fur Trade* quarterly shows box labels for butcher knives from 1834 stating they were made from both best cast steel and best tilted steel.⁸ These different steel qualitys will be described later.

⁷ Rees. *Butlers' commercial list*, pp. 86-88.

⁸ Hanson, James. *The MFT Quarterly*. Vol. 39, No.4 (2003): 14

Wilson knives and the Rocky Mountain fur trade



Excerpt from Harrison Rodgers' 1826 journal where on August 23rd, Emmanuel Lazarus bought a Wilson knife at \$1.50.
Source: Missouri Historical Society

Although it has been claimed that Wilson knives were brought west by Lewis and Clark as early as 1804 the earliest reference found for this article is an 1818 inventory from the U.S. office of Indian Trade at Natchitoches for *25 Doz. Wilson's Butcher Knives @ 2.75*. The earliest fur company reference found comes from 1825 when the American Fur Company (AFC) ordered *8 dozen sent to St. Louis*.⁹ The references to Wilson knives then keeps on flowing throughout the rendezvous era (1825-1840). Here are a few more examples of Wilson knives out west:

1826 - Jedediah Smith brought at least one Wilson knife from the Willow Valley rendezvous for his Southwest Expedition (note pictured above).¹⁰

1829 - AFC equipped Etienne Provost for a trapping expedition including *3 doz Wilson's butcher knives*.¹¹

1830 - Upper Missouri Outfit (UMO) ordered Wilson butchers along with two grades of scalpers.¹²

1834 – Fort Union carried *50 doz. Wilson butcher knives*.¹³

1835 – 50+50 dozen Wilson butcher knives destined for Fort Pierre were shipped on board S.B. Diana C.M. Halstead Master.¹⁴

1837 – Rocky Mountain Outfit (RMO) were furnished *17+3 dozen Wilson's Butcher Knives*.¹⁵

⁹ Shackleford. *Blade's Guide to Knives & Their Values*. 323. & Hanson, Charles. *The MFT Quarterly*. Vol. 23, No.3 (1987): 1-4

¹⁰ Rodgers, Harrison. *Harrison Rodgers' Journal, in the Southwest with Jedediah Smith, November 26, 1826-January 27, 1827*. 8

¹¹ Olsen & McCloskey. *Supply & Demand*. 78.

¹² Hanson, Charles. *The MFT Quarterly*. Vol. 23, No.3 (1987): 1-4, also read Appendix C for more information on Wilson made scalpers.

¹³ Olsen & McCloskey. *Supply & Demand*. 108

¹⁴ Ibid. 93

¹⁵ <https://user.xmission.com/~drudy/mtman/html/rmo1837.html>

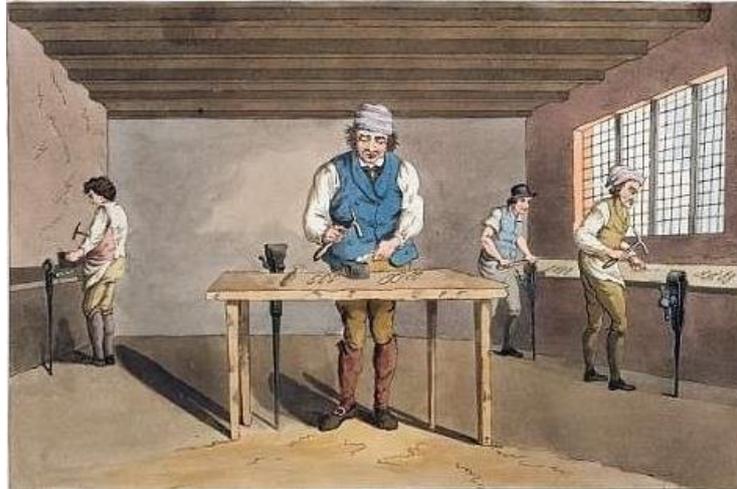
Sheffield and the Cutlers' Company

With a cutlery manufacturing tradition tracing back to the 13th century, Sheffield, the *iron steel and cutlery capital of the world*, was the place to get suitable knives to trade for furs in the Rocky Mountains.¹⁶ In 1812; 6 000 people out of Sheffield's working population of 18 000 were tied to the American export market.¹⁷

In order to understand the cutlery trade and the role of cutler's marks, a few rows on the powerful Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire are in place.

The cutlery trade in Sheffield during the 18th and 19th century was governed by the local craft guild; the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire, or Cutlers' Company for short.

The Cutlers' Company was formed as early as 1624 by an act of parliament, which gave it jurisdiction of *all persons using to make Knives, Blades, Scissors, Sheeres, Sickles, Cutlery wares and all other wares and manufacture made or wrought of yron and steele, dwelling or inhabiting within the said Lordship and Liberty of Hallamshire, or within six miles compasse of the same*¹⁸. Hallamshire was the ancient district centered on Sheffield castle¹⁹.



"Sheffield Cutler" from George Walkers "Costume of Yourkshire" from 1814.

The Cutlers' Company consist of its Freemen that yearly elect a Master Cutler as head of the organization. Historically only Freemen of the company were allowed to stamp a mark on their cutlery. A young man (or boy) wanting to become a Freeman with a personal mark had to serve an apprenticeship under a cutler that was already a Freeman. The apprenticeship was registered at the Cutlers' Company headquarters known as Cutlers' Hall and normally lasted around seven to eight years or until the young man was at least 21 years old. After that the apprentice could gain freedom i.e. become a Freeman. Which if granted by the company, meant he was free to produce and market cutlery with a mark of his own. Sons of already registered Freemen could be granted as Freemen themselves without having to go through registered apprenticeship if they were trained by their fathers.²⁰

The marks themselves could be symbols, letters, numbers etc. that was stamped into the steel with a mark-punch in order to make the product traceable. To keep track of who owned the rights to what mark, all marks were recorded in the mark books kept by the Cutlers' Company. Cutlers were even required to deposit copies of their mark punches at the Cutlers' Hall, but periodically the company

¹⁶ Tweedale. *Tweedale's Directory of Sheffield Cutlery Manufacturers 1740-2013*, p.1. & Sheffield on the internet. *Sheffield's industrial history*.

¹⁷ <http://www.sheffieldcutlerymap.org.uk/history-of-the-cutlery-industry/>

¹⁸ Sheffield Trade Directory Index, searchable at: <http://www.sheffieldrecordsonline.org.uk/>

¹⁹ Binfield and Hey. *Mesters to Masters*. p.1

²⁰ Binfield and Hey. *Mesters to Masters*. p.31

instructed them to bring their working punches to the Hall. Copies of which were then marked in the books.²¹

In the early 1800's a decline in the legal powers held by the Cutlers' Company meant that hardly any marks were registered. A trend that lasted until the 1870's when the Company acted as a sub-office of the National Trade Marks Office. This forced some cutlers to defend their claimed mark-rights in new ways. Many of the advertisement and announcements referred to in this study where accusations of fraudulent mark use and counterfeits are made, are good examples of this.²²

The Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire is still active working to *maintain the standards and quality of Sheffield manufactured cutlery and steel products and to promote the name of Sheffield.*²³

²¹ The National Archives. *Archive of the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire.*

²² Unwin, Joan Dr. Honorary Research Fellow, University of Sheffield, Archivist, the Cutlers' Company. E-mail 2019-03-06

²³ The Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire: cutlers-hallamshire.org.uk

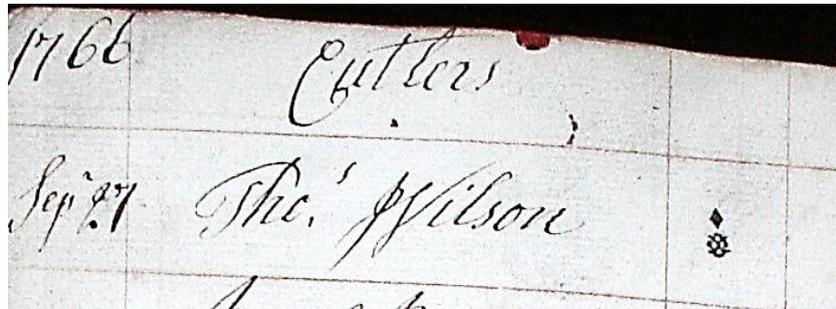
Wilson family and company history

In 1875, a gentleman antiquarian from Sheffield named Robert E. Leader described the early years of the Wilson company as follows:

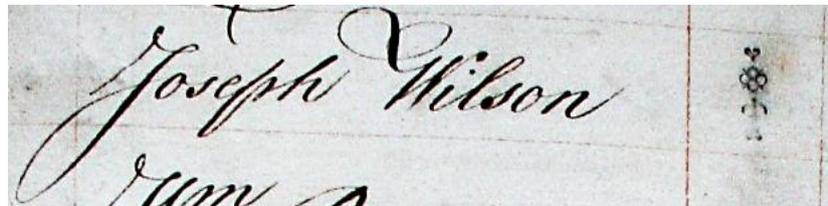
In Cross Smithfield was established, somewhere about the middle of last century [1700's], the business now carried on in Sycamore street by Mr. Thomas Wilson, the grandson of its founder. The germs of the business seem to have been laid by old Thomas Wilson at Ran Moor or Hallam. He was one of the enterprising men who first saw the possibility of dispensing with factors and of opening up connections of his own without the intervention of a middle-man. Determining to offer his knives "shoemakers' and butchers'" for sale himself, he packed up his goods and took them on his back into Lancashire. Wherever he sold any knives, he told the purchasers he should come again at a fixed period of time, and if the article did not suit he would return the money. On his next journey he had no complaints, but so much greater demand that some of the retail shops would have purchased the whole of his stock, but he kept to his promise to the others. He readily sold all he had taken, and soon returned home to manufacture more goods with which to complete his journey. This was the first time that the trade mark of the Four Peppercorns and a Diamond with the name "Wilson" went into the market; now it is a guarantee of good quality in all the countries of the world.²⁴

Leader likely got this story directly from the firm years after these events took place, so it should be noted that Sheffield companies were notorious for giving themselves ancestry.²⁵

The Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire, granted the mark of four peppercorns and a diamond in their mark book to Thomas Wilson (1745-1808) when he became a Freeman in 1766.²⁶ This is a more likely foundation year than 1750 as claimed above and in later advertisements.²⁷ Thomas being five years old in 1750 is another argument for a later foundation.



1766 mark registered to Thomas Wilson. The birth of 'four peppercorns and a diamond'. By kind permission of the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire.



1761 mark registered to Joseph Wilson. By kind permission of the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire.

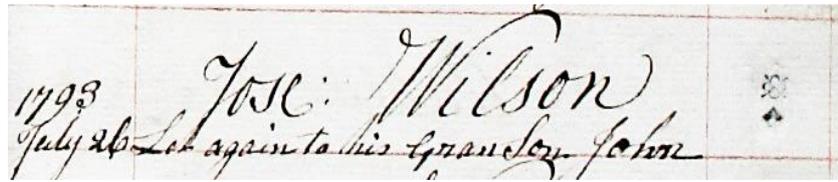
²⁴ Leader. *Reminiscences of old Sheffield*, pp.131-132

²⁵ Unwin, Joan Dr. Honorary Research Fellow, University of Sheffield, Archivist, the Cutlers' Company. E-mail 2019-03-07

²⁶ Aikin. *The Athenaeum*, p.178. and Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire, 1766 registration of Thomas Wilson.

²⁷ Graces Guide, Im1853WLeeds-JohnWilson.jpg [online image] 1853, <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/File:Im1853WLeeds-JohnWilson.jpg>

Before becoming a Freeman, Thomas was apprenticed to his own father, a cutler from Hallam named Joseph, which speaks for that part of Leaders story above.²⁸ No record has been found of Joseph's freedom mark, though a later note pictured to the right suggests he might have used a mark containing four peppercorns and a heart as symbols.²⁹



'1793 July 26 Jose. Wilson Let again to his Gran Son John' By kind permission of the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire.

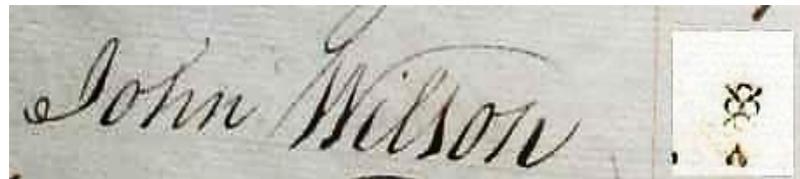
Records also indicate that Thomas might have had two brothers named Joseph like their father, and Samuel.

Joseph Jr. was apprenticed to another cutler from Hallam named William Torr between 1762 to 1761. Upon freedom he was granted a symbol-based mark consisting of four different symbols. One was the four peppercorns. Samuel was apprenticed to a John Dale in 1758 but apparently never registered his freedom.³⁰

In 1772 Thomas Wilson's first out of five children was born in *Nether Green, a pleasant little village, about two miles from Sheffield.*³¹ His name was John, and he is the center figure of this study.

Little is known about John's younger years, except that he appears to have served his apprenticeship with his father.

In 1793, when John was 21 years old, Thomas was still active as a cutler. So, in order to comply with the Cutlers' Company rule that all active Freemen had to use unique marks, John was granted a freedom mark similar but different enough to pass as unique compared to that of his father. This is never mentioned in the firm's later advertisements, where they claim rights to the four peppercorns and a diamond as their only corporate mark. The mark granted to John Wilson in 1793 was that *Let again* by his grandfather Joseph, i.e. four peppercorns and a heart.



1793 mark registered to a John Wilson. By kind permission of the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire.

According to a memoir dedicated to John, he joined the Church of Christ around 1801 as he had become *decidedly religious*. He later became a deacon, just like his father Thomas once had been.³²

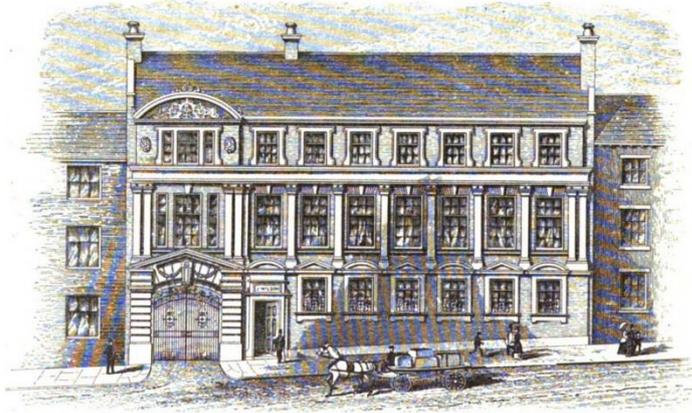
²⁸ Leader. List of Apprentices and Freemen, searchable at: <http://www.sheffieldrecordsonline.org.uk/> & Unwin, Joan Dr. Honorary Research Fellow, University of Sheffield, Archivist, the Cutlers' Company. E-mail 2019-03-07

²⁹ Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire, 1793 note on Joseph Wilson.

³⁰ Leader. List of Apprentices and Freemen, searchable at: <http://www.sheffieldrecordsonline.org.uk/> and Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire

³¹ *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*. Vol. 27 (1849) pp. 337-342 and Tweedale. *Tweedale's Directory of Sheffield Cutlery Manufacturers 1740-2013*, pp. 670-671

³² *Ibid.*



John Wilson's establishment at Sycamore street from Butchers' advocate. Vol. 24 No. 12 (1898).

John appears to have worked with his father until Thomas passed away in 1808.³³ Three years later, in the earliest mention of the business found in trade directories, the business is listed as *Wilson Thos. and Son, manufacts. of shoe, cooks', and butchers' knives and steels*.³⁴ That is also the earliest found reference to their address on Sycamore street where their factory and office was situated until the middle of the 20th century.³⁵

Besides keeping his father's name in the company, John apparently also kept on using his father's mark instead of that granted to himself in 1793. As mark rights were not inherited father to son as one might think, he should have gone to the Cutlers' Company to have the four peppercorns and diamond mark registered under his own name. But no such record has been found.³⁶ A possible explanation to this is that this generational change in management happened during a period when the power held to govern mark rights by the Cutlers' Company declined. This meant that fewer cutlers chose to have their marks registered at Cutlers Hall, and they thereby chose to claim their mark rights in other ways than through the Cutlers' Company. This is probably one of the main reasons why John and his successors made such an effort advertising the four peppercorns and a diamond as their corporate mark around the world. Other cutlers misused the mark, but without the support of the Cutlers' Company, the Wilson firm had to fight their competition through media.

JOHN WILSON'S SHOE, BREAD, COOK, BUTCHERS', PALLET, GLAZIERS' AND FARRIERS' KNIVES, BUTCHERS' STEELS, &c. &c.—
The continued invasion of John Wilson's Corporation Mark, has compelled him to institute legal proceedings against a manufacturer, whose acknowledgment is copied below.
The public are reminded that John Wilson's mark is Four Pepper Corns and a Diamond, which is stamped upon all goods of his manufacture, in one of the following forms—

NOTICE.
COUNTERFEITING A MARK.
I. JAMES HODGSON, of Shade Hill, in Sheffield, Cutler, do acknowledge that I have very fraudulently and improperly forged upon Shoe Knives made by me, the MARK granted by the Corporation of Cutlers to, and used by, Mr. JOHN WILSON, of Sycamore Street, for which he has commenced a prosecution against me, but in consideration of my circumstances and large family, and on me thus publicly confessing my offence, faithfully promising never to do the like in future, and paying a small fine and all expenses incurred, he most kindly consented to abandon the present proceedings, for which I feel myself truly grateful.—Dated this 23^d day of November, 1830.
Witness,
JAMES HODGSON.
JAMES WILSON, Law Clerk to the Cutler's Company.
Jan-12 C&S1m

Announcement from 1831 found in the New York Spectator showing the different marks used by John Wilson at the time.

³³ Aikin. *The Athenaeum*, p.178.

³⁴ Sheffield Trade Directory Index, searchable at: <http://www.sheffieldrecordsonline.org.uk/>

³⁵ http://stazors.com/index.php?id=478&doc=joseph_elliot_and_sons_sheffield and <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/File:Im1951Benn-JohnWilson7.jpg>

³⁶ Unwin, Joan Dr. Honorary Research Fellow, University of Sheffield, Archivist, the Cutlers' Company. E-mail 2009-12-09

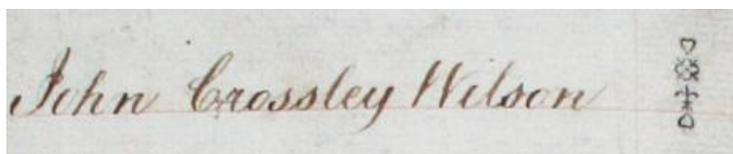
The most extreme example of Wilson's mark claims comes from an announcement published in several American newspapers during the fall of 1831. An accused counterfeiter named James Hodgson admits having misused ... *the MARK granted by the Corporation of Cutlers to, and used by Mr. JOHN WILSON of Sycamore street...* but it does not say what granted mark it is referring to. Instead it is published together with one of Wilson's informative advertisements where *The public are reminded that John Wilson's mark is Four Pepper Corns and a Diamond, which is stamped upon all goods of his manufacture...* .³⁷ This leaves it up to the reader to assume what mark Hodgson actually misused.

The 1814-1815 directory lists John Wilson on Sycamore street leaving father Thomas out of the company name.³⁸ By John's ...*preservance, he rendered "the firm" eminent in the mercantile community, and raised the articles they made to such celebrity, that down "to this present" they stand unrivalled in every market of the world.*³⁹

In April 1818 John married a girl named Mary Crossley, the daughter of a John Crossley. Esq., of Eastwood near Halifax.⁴⁰ The couple made Oakholme, an estate in a part of Sheffield called Endcliffe Vale, their family home. ⁴¹ Their relation resulted in ten children, with eight surviving past John's death.⁴² The children whose names have been found for this paper are John, Thomas, Samuel, William, Mary and Esther.⁴³ Mary eventually married Sir Frederick Thorpe Mappin.⁴⁴ Some of them appear to have used both parent's birth names i.e. Crossley Wilson.⁴⁵

On March the third 1849 John passed away at his beloved Oakholme, 77 years old.⁴⁶ The obituary from local newspapers describe him as *Amiable and kind in all his domestic relations,- princely in his benevolence,- attractively humble in his Christian deportment he passed through life beloved by all and died in the faith and hope of the gospel.* ⁴⁷

With John's passing, his oldest son, John Jr. or John Crossley Wilson as he is sometimes referred to became manager. He was a Freeman since 1845 when he was granted the same mark as his uncle Joseph Jr was in 1761.⁴⁸ He also started serving as assistant with the Cutlers' Company like his father once did.⁴⁹ Being the oldest son, John Crossley



1845 mark registered to John Crossley Wilson. By kind permission of the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire.

³⁷ *NY Spectator*. Vol. XXXIV. Feb 11 (1831). & *Portland Advertiser*. vol. 1. no. 60 (1831): 4

³⁸ Wardle and Bentham (pub). *Commercial Directory of Sheffield. 1814-1815*, p. 221.

³⁹ *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*. Vol. 27 (1849) pp. 337-342

⁴⁰ *The Northern star, or, Yorkshire Magazine*. Vol: 2 (1818) p. 335

⁴¹ *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*. Vol. 27 (1849) and Tweedale. *Tweedale's Directory of Sheffield Cutlery Manufacturers 1740-2013*, pp. 670-671

⁴² *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*. Vol. 27 (1849) pp. 337-342

⁴³ Tweedale. *Tweedale's Directory of Sheffield Cutlery Manufacturers 1740-2013*, pp. 670-671 and *The United Service Magazine*. Part III (1856) p.330

⁴⁴ Northend (pub). *Hallamshire Worthies, Notable Men and Women of Sheffield*, p. 94

⁴⁵ <https://www.geni.com/people/John-Wilson/6000000012163745219>

⁴⁶ *London Gazette*, 3186 and *Butchers' advocate*. Vol. 24 No. 12 (1898) p. 12 and Tweedale. *Tweedale's Directory of Sheffield Cutlery Manufacturers 1740-2013*, pp. 670-671

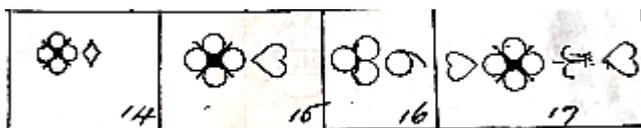
⁴⁷ *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*. Vol. 27 (1849) pp. 337-342

⁴⁸ Apprentices and Freeman, searchable at: <http://www.sheffieldrecordsonline.org.uk/>.

⁴⁹ *Leader. History of the Company of cutlers in Hallamshire*, Vol II, p. 47

was likely the planned successor to the I. Wilson business. But his management career was short lived as he died in 1851 only 28 years old.⁵⁰

John Jr's younger brother Thomas (1832-1905) now stepped up and retained a leading position with the company, almost up to the next century.⁵¹ As no record of Thomas' apprenticeship or freedom has been found he likely never had a granted mark of his own.



Marks associated to John Wilson, Sycamore St. Sheffield. Source: Whites Hardware Trade Marks from 1891.

ADVERTISEMENTS 97



Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations, 1851.
President, His Royal Highness Prince Albert, R. G., &c.

THE PRIZE MEDAL

For the Best Manufactured Articles in Shoe Knives, Butchers' Knives, Cooks' Knives, Bread Knives, Curriers' Knives, Farriers' Knives, Glaziers' Knives, Palette Knives, Weavers' Knives, Butchers' Steels, &c. &c., was Awarded by the JURORS, under the Sanction of the ROYAL COMMISSIONERS, to

JOHN WILSON & SON, ONLY,
SYCAMORE STREET, SHEFFIELD,
(ESTABLISHED IN THE YEAR, 1750.)
And was Officially Notified in the LONDON GAZETTE of Friday, October 17th, 1851.—Jury XXI., page 2690.

In consequence of the acknowledged celebrity of the Knives, Steels, &c., of JOHN WILSON & SON'S manufacture, which have for more than a Century been allowed to be superior to all others, certain unprincipled persons, both in this Country and on the Continent, have been led by their cupidity to imitate the Marks, as well as to resort to other modes of imposition, for the purpose of vending their spurious articles, as and for articles of the said JOHN WILSON & SON'S manufacture:—Observe, therefore, that all Knives, Steels, &c., of JOHN WILSON & SON'S manufacture, are invariably stamped with their Corporation Mark, "FOUR PEPPERCORNS AND A DIAMOND," thus ☒• in one of the following forms:—

I. WILSON, ☒• I. WILSON, ☒• I. WILSON, ☒• I. WILSON,
☒• REFINED STEEL WARRANTED SHEAR STEEL

Notice is hereby Given,

That all persons whomsoever, who shall COUNTERFEIT or IMITATE the MARKS used by the said JOHN WILSON & SON, or who shall sell any Shoe, Bread, Butchers', Cooks', or any other KNIVES, or any Butchers' STEELS, STAMPED with any such counterfeit or imitated Marks, will, immediately after they shall be discovered, be proceeded against in one of the COURTS OF LAW or EQUITY.

F 2

Part of John Wilson & Son advertisement from Sheffield. Source: Sheffield as it is from 1852

With the involvement of a new generation the company name was changed, or updated rather, to John Wilson & Son in 1849. Under that name they won first prize at the Great Exhibition of 1851 and finally re-registered the four peppercorns and diamond mark with the Cutlers' Company in 1878.⁵² By 1879 they changed the company name back to plain John Wilson again.⁵³

In 1891 the John Wilson firm claimed to have four different symbol marks tied to their business. Three of these have been found to be freedom marks granted to Wilson family members as presented above. The source of number 16 however, a trefoil and a six or nine, has not been found for this paper.

How much of the actual knife manufacture that took place on Sycamore Street is hard to say for sure. By 1861 the firm employed 33 men and boys and peaked at about the double number. Apparently, John Sr. rented Loxley Glass Tilt and Beeley Wood Works for the forging of blades.⁵⁴ There was also the practice of 'buying in' parts of the production, which was a common practice among the Sheffield cutlers, and Wilson was probably no exception.⁵⁵

As Thomas never had any children, he soon brought in outside help to run the business.⁵⁶ The 1852 Sheffield directory mentions the involvement of Edward Ridgway

⁵⁰ *Butchers' advocate*. Vol. 24 No. 12 (1898) p. 12 & <https://www.geni.com/people/John-Crossley-Wilson/600000016765629025>

⁵¹ *Butchers' advocate*. Vol. 24 No. 12 (1898) p. 12, *London Gazette*, Issue 27823 (1905) p. 5334 and Tweedale. *Tweedale's Directory of Sheffield Cutlery Manufacturers 1740-2013*, pp. 670-671

⁵² 1878 registration pictured on pg. 23, White. *General Directory of Sheffield, 1879*. p. 229 and *London Gazette*, 21254

⁵³ White. *Whites General and Commercial Directory of Sheffield, 1879*. p. 12

⁵⁴ Tweedale. *Tweedale's Directory of Sheffield Cutlery Manufacturers 1740-2013*, pp. 670-671

⁵⁵ Unwin, Joan Dr. Honorary Research Fellow, University of Sheffield, Archivist, the Cutlers' Company. E-mail 2019-03-06

⁵⁶ Tweedale. *Tweedale's Directory of Sheffield Cutlery Manufacturers 1740-2013*, pp. 670-671

(1820-1893), *cashier & mangr. (Wilson & Son)*⁵⁷. Later, Edward's son, Edward Frederic (1850-1933) also joined the company. In an 1888 Australian advertisement for Wilson knives the partner trio behind the brand is presented as *Thomas Wilson (son of the late John Wilson), Edward Ridgway, Edward Frederic Ridgway*. Edward left the collaboration in 1890, and Thomas finally retired in 1898. This left Edward F. to *continue the said business under the said style of John Wilson*.⁵⁸ In 1903 Edward F. bought the entire business, and so the connection between the Wilson family and the Wilson brand was ended.⁵⁹ Thomas Wilson died in 1905.

In 1924 Edward F. formed John Wilson (Sheffield) Ltd. By his death in 1933 a former clerk of the company named Joseph Brittlebank (1863-1948) became chairman, and remained on that post until his own passing in 1948.⁶⁰ Sometime thereafter, what remained of the Wilson firm was incorporated as a subsidiary under Joseph Elliot & Sons (Sheffield) Ltd who thereby owned the rights to Wilson's trademarks and continued producing peppercorn and diamond marked knives on Sylvester Street into the second half of the 1900's.⁶¹

Sadly, no paintings or pictures of mentioned Wilson family members has been found for this paper. Museum of the Fur Trade (MFT) has published a portrait of a man believed to be the John Wilson in question. Figure 2.22 in Volume 3 - The Encyclopedia of Trade Goods is one example of this.⁶² Unfortunately it depicts a different John Wilson than the cutler of interest. The man depicted in the engraving is John Wilson, Esquire of Broomhead Hall (1719-1783) without any found connection to the Wilsons active on Sycamore street.⁶³

⁵⁷ White. *General Directory of Sheffield, 1852*. p. 186 and Tweedale. *Tweedale's Directory of Sheffield Cutlery Manufacturers 1740-2013*, pp. 670-671

⁵⁸ *London Gazette*, Issue 26067 (1890) p. 3735 & Issue 27005 (1898) p. 5505

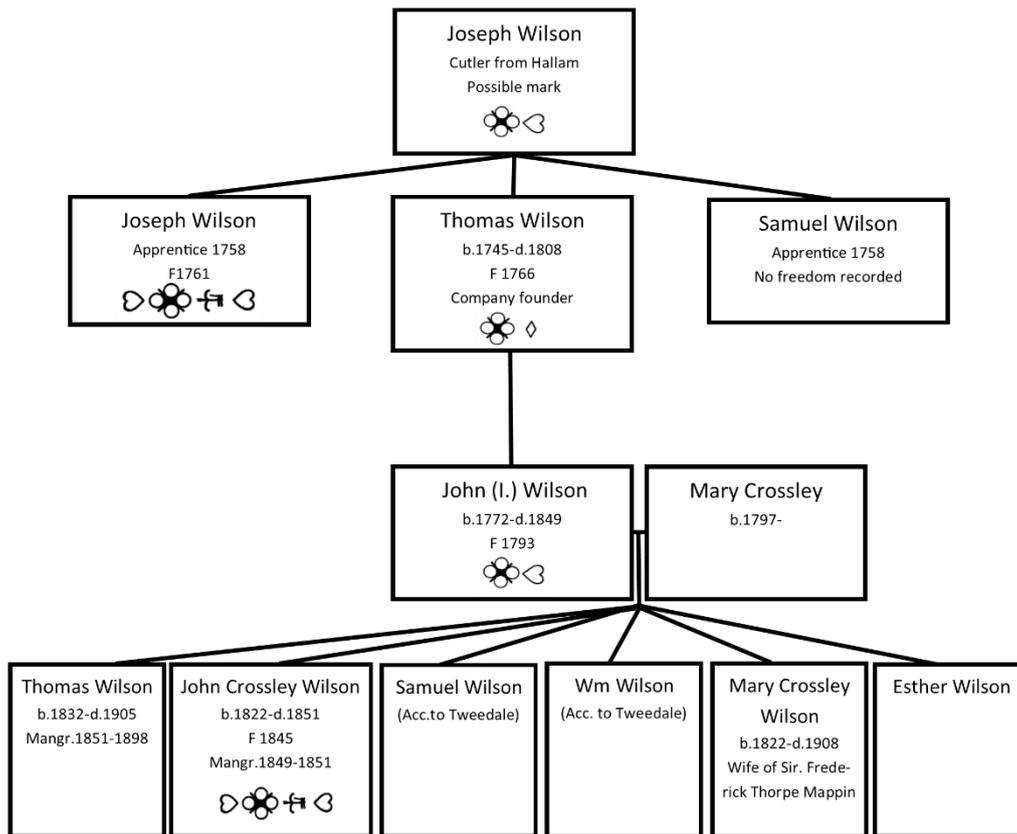
⁵⁹ *Iron Age*. Vol.80. Dec 26 (1896) p.1863 and Tweedale. *Tweedale's Directory of Sheffield Cutlery Manufacturers 1740-2013*, pp. 670-671

⁶⁰ Tweedale. *Tweedale's Directory of Sheffield Cutlery Manufacturers 1740-2013*, pp. 670-671

⁶¹ http://strazors.com/index.php?id=478&doc=joseph_elliott_and_sons_sheffield and <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/File:lm1951Benn-JohnWilson7.jpg>

⁶² Hanson. *Volume 3 - The Encyclopedia of Trade Goods*. p.65 and Hanson, James. *The MFT Quarterly*. Vol. 44, No.1 (2008): 10-11.

⁶³ Hunter. *The history and topography of the parish of Sheffield in the county of York*. pp.275-277



The Wilson family tree as presented in Wilson family and company history above

Steel – John Wilson’s second business

In 1825 John Wilson partnered up with a John Wilson Hawksworth for John’s second business in steel. They are initially listed as merchants on Wilson’s Sycamore street address but soon added steel refinement to their list of trades. They named the company Wilson & Hawksworth (W&H).⁶⁴

In the late 1820’s W&H had become the main steel supplier for John Wilson’s cutlery business. Advertisements published in American newspapers during this period states that *All Knives, Steels, &c.*

*manufactured by John Wilson, are made from Wilson & Hawksworth’s best warranted steel.*⁶⁵

In 1829 W&H added an American agent named Joshua Moss in New York. Through Moss they had the ambition *...to furnish all kinds of Steel, of quality not to be excelled.*⁶⁶ He was so successful he became a third partner in 1832, creating Wilson, Hawksworth and Moss (WH&M).⁶⁷

To make steel, iron and carbon must be combined to an alloy. The higher carbon content, the harder but more brittle becomes the steel. One of the top brand iron bars that were used for steelmaking at the time was Swedish *Hoop L* iron. L stands for Leufsta iron works (Löfstabruk). It was so popular, counterfeit problems forced the sole importers in Great Britain at the time, Joseph Sykes & Sons, to limit their sales to a few companies *...of whom alone the Genuine Hoop L Steel [iron] can be obtained.* W&H was one of those companies.⁶⁸

SHEFFIELD & BEELEY WOOD STEEL WORKS.
We beg respectfully to refer the public to the above advertisement, of Messrs. Sykes & Sons, of Hull, who are the sole importers of the *Genuine (L)* Swedish Iron, which for all steel purposes, has long had such a decided preference.
We have again contracted (under the present arrangement of Messrs. Sykes & Sons,) for a regular supply of the above article; and we assure the trade of our determination to furnish all kinds of Steel, of quality not to be excelled. Sheffield, Aug. 21, 1830. **WILSON & HAWKSWORTH.**
Orders for Wilson & Hawksworth's Steel, addressed to them, or to their Agent, JOSHUA MOSS, No. 43 Pinestreet, New York, will receive due attention. Jan 12-C&SIm
The Editors of the Gazette, Montreal; Neilson's Gazette, Quebec; Herald, Kingston; Guardian, York; Daily Advertiser, Rochester; Journal, Buffalo; and Argus, Albany, will please publish the above two weeks, and transmit their accounts for collection

Advertisement for Wilson & Hawksworth steel from New York Spectator 1831.



Piece of Swedish 'Hoop L' iron bar from Leufsta (Löfstabruk). Source: Upplandsmuseet ID UM39462

⁶⁴ Varey (pub). *General & Commercial Directory of Sheffield, 1825*, p. 93

⁶⁵ *American & Commercial Daily Advertiser*. Vol. LVIII. Sep 27 (1828)., *Oneida Observer*, Vol. XII No. 621. Dec 9 (1828). & *NY Spectator*. Vol. XXXI. Nov 14 (1828)

⁶⁶ *New York Spectator*. Vol. XXXIV. Feb 11 (1831).

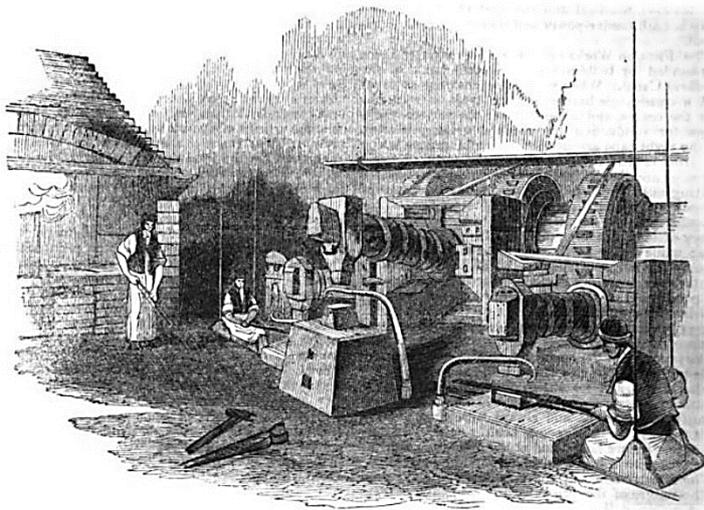
⁶⁷ Tweedale. *Tweedale's Directory of Sheffield Cutlery Manufacturers 1740-2013*, pp. 669-670

⁶⁸ *Ibid & Portland Advertiser*. vol. 1. no. 60 (1831) p. 4.

With so few connections between Sweden and the Rocky Mountain fur trade being known the Swedish author of this article finds this noteworthy.

Sheffield manufacturers used several methods to make and refine the steel. The resulting steel qualities were given different trade names. Some of these were eventually stamped on John Wilson's knife blades.

The earliest method on which further refinement relies is called cementation, which creates cemented- or blister steel after the blisters that form on the steel surface. This was basically iron bars that were carbonized by cooking them with charcoal in a so-called cementation furnace for a week. As blister steel had high carbon content on the surface but less in the center, other methods were used to get a more homogenic carbon content.⁶⁹



Shear and tilt hammers. Source: *The Penny Magazine*, March 1844

One such labor-intensive method was to bundle the bars of blister steel, and forge weld them together into what was called shear steel. If the process was repeated it was called double shear steel. Shear steel was first imported from Germany and wasn't produced in Sheffield until the second half of the 18th century.⁷⁰

Another method that was invented by Benjamin Huntsman in the 1740's, cut the blister steel into pieces and melted them in a clay pot called a crucible. This allowed the carbon to

dissolve evenly within the steel and the slag could be skimmed off. The result was called cast steel, Huntsman steel or crucible steel and became a direct competitor to the more expensive shear steel.⁷¹

A third step in steel refinement was called tilting. *All steel for the best articles is tilted before being applied to use whether it be 'shear' or 'cast'*. This means the steel was pounded with a tilting hammer to close the pores.⁷²

The 1834 labels published in issue 33:4 of *Museum of the Fur Trade* quarterly further confirms WH&M's continued role as steel suppliers for John's original business.⁷³ Based on surviving specimens, the firm also sold a range of edged tools under their name.



Mark on a table knife marked "WILSON, HAWKSWORTH & MOSS". Author's collection.

⁶⁹ Tweedale. *Tweedale's Directory of Sheffield Cutlery Manufacturers 1740-2013*, p.2

⁷⁰ Birch, Allen. *Economic History of the British Iron and Steel Industry*. P.305, Tweedale. *Sheffield steel and America*. 32 & Hanson, James. *Fur Trade Cutlery Sketchbook*. p.3

⁷¹ Ibid. p 5

⁷² *The Penny Magazine*, March 1844, pp.124-128

⁷³ <http://strazors.com/uploads/images/articles/kayser.pdf> & Hanson, James. *The MFT Quarterly*. Vol. 39, No.4 (2003): 14

For some reason, the company used different names in the US compared to Britain. When John died in 1849 they were known as Wilson, Hawksworth, Moss and Ellison (Joseph Ellison joined in 1846) in Britain, and Wilson, Hawksworth and Company in the US. John's death appears to have ended the connections between the two firms.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ *London Gazette*, 3186, Tweedale. *Tweedale's Directory of Sheffield Cutlery Manufacturers 1740-2013*, pp. 669-670 and *Butchers' advocate*. Vol. 24 No. 12 (1898): 12

Struck upon the blades in one of the forms following

The question of freedom marks tied to the Wilson family has already been discussed in detail. The marks used on actual knives remains to be presented. Sometime around 1800 it appears many cutlers updated their mark punches with more information than used before. Besides freedom marks, knives were now beginning to be marked with for example company names and steel quality. The Wilson firm was no exception to this trend. These different combinations of symbols and text play an important role when trying to determine the age of a Wilson knife.

18th century marks, knives made by Thomas Wilson

Like most 18th century knives from Sheffield, John Wilson's father Thomas likely used his granted freedom mark without any added text on his products. Leaders story quoted in the family and company history suggests that the name Wilson became a part of the mark sometime during the 1700's. But lacking more documentation and survivors with known provenance it is hard to say for sure.

Based on the assumption that Thomas only used the four peppercorns and diamond mark when stamping his blades, there are a few surviving knives claimed to be of old Thomas' make. Lee Burke, who has written a great article on Wilson's marks in the Museum of the fur trade quarterly, shows an example of a blade with only the symbols remaining in his article. The blade is worn down by hard use, as is usually the case when a plausible Thomas Wilson knife is presented. Like Burke says about his own example, it could just as well be the much later triangular mark with the lettering worn away.⁷⁵



Example of a well-worn butcher with remains of the triangular mark and not the symbols mark given the still visible remnants of I. WILSON stamped below the peppercorns and diamond. Authors collection



Mark on butcher knife: †EBRO†, THOMAS WILSON, SHEAR STEEL, SHEFFIELD ENGLAND. Likely from the first half of the 1900's without any found connection to the Wilsons in question. Source: Ebay

Another mark found on knives sometimes claimed to be of old Thomas' make are butcher knives marked THOMAS WILSON, SHEAR STEEL, SHEFFIELD ENGLAND. These are almost identical to I. Wilson's butcher knives in their design, except they bear a mark containing the post 1890 country of origin (discussed later on) and an occasional †EBRO† on top.⁷⁶ As there were plenty of Sheffield cutlers named Wilson besides those active on Sycamore Street, these knives likely have nothing to do with either Thomas Wilson (1745-1808) or his grandson Thomas

⁷⁵ Burke. *The MFT Quarterly*. Vol. 14, No.3. (1978) 1-7

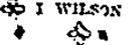
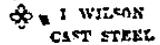
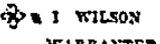
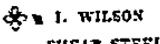
⁷⁶ Two Maltese crosses with EBRO between them is an old mark. According to Tweedale's directory it was granted in 1773. In 1864 it was assigned to Joseph Wostenholm & Sons. In 1904 the Kastor Brothers of New York bought the Wostenholm firm and it's marks, and together with their Sheffield associate Alfred Williams used EBRO well into the 1900's. So why post-1890 knives by Thomas Wilson (Sheffield) Ltd were the marked EBRO remains a mystery.

Wilson (1832-1905) as they should have used their corporate mark on the blades. Instead, these knives were possibly made by yet another Thomas Wilson (1859-1940). He had a cutlery and plate business active from 1889 to 1926 when the firm was liquidated. While residing at Continental Works on Milton Street the firm named Thomas Wilson (Sheffield) Ltd advertised for *TABLE CUTLERY, BUTCHERKNIVES, &c.*⁷⁷

In other words, no Wilson knife of Thomas make from the 18th century has been found for this study. This raises the question of how active Thomas was as a knife manufacturer before John was involved in the business. Another indicator suggesting a low rate production is that Sheffield directories from the late 18th century fail to mention him and the four peppercorns and a diamond⁷⁸.

Early 19th century marks; IOHN WILSON takes over

IOHN WILSON,
SYCAMORE STREET, SHEFFIELD,
THE
Original Manufacturer
OR
*Shoe, Butchers, Weavers, Bread, Cooks, Putty, Glaziers,
and Farrier Knives,*
BUTCHERS' STEELS, &c.
*Part of an 1839 advertisement where the I
instead of a J is emphasized. Source: Grace's*

WILSON'S KNIVES.
CAUTION! TO THE PUBLIC.
**JOHN WILSON, Sycamore Street, Sheffield, Manu-
facturer of Shoe, Butchers', Weavers', Bread,
Cook, Pallet, Glaziers', Carriers' Knives, Butchers'
Steels, &c. &c.**
In consequence of the acknowledged celebrity of John
Wilson's "KNIVES AND STEELS," which have
for near a century been allowed superior to all other,
a number of persons are continually counterfeiting
the same with the intent of imposing on the public
by stamping the name "WILSON" or otherwise imitat-
ing his mark, by which means many unwary purchasers
are deceived. John Wilson thinks it right to caution
the public against the deceptions, by informing them
that his distinguishing Corporation Mark is "FOUR
PEPPER CORNS AND A DIAMOND," thus  which it is
felony for any other person to use, and which mark is
stamped upon all KNIVES AND STEELS of his
manufacture, in one of the following forms:—
 
 
**IF ALL KNIVES, STEELS, &c. Manufactured by
JOHN WILSON are made from WILSON AND
HAWKSWORTH'S BEST WARRANTED STEEL.**
2s 2s 2s 4s*

*Announcement from September 1828 found in
American & Commercial Daily Advertiser showing
the different marks used by John Wilson at the
time*

The early years of the 19th century (just like the 18th) is something of a gap in documentation and provenanced specimens showing how the Wilson firm actually stamped their produce. As mentioned, John was granted a freedom mark of his own, but no proof has been found that he ever used it as a knife manufacturer. Instead he continued to use and claim rights to his father's mark i.e. the four peppercorns and a diamond.

Changing the company name from *Thomas Wilson & Son* to *John Wilson* on Sycamore Street in the 1810's combined with early American orders for *Wilson's Butcher Knives* like that from the U.S. office of Indian Trade at Natchitoches in 1818, suggests the name "WILSON" or even "I. WILSON" was added to the mark punch during this period. Even though Leader says that might have happened even earlier⁷⁹

When adding his name to the mark, John chose to use an I instead of a J as his first name initial. Lee Burke claims the use of I for J was a surviving trend from the middle ages ending by the early 1800's.⁸⁰ Without speculating further on why, this study can only confirm the tradition was kept alive by John and his successors until the very end of the brand.

From the late 1820's into the 1900's, the Wilson firm's reaction through media around the world caused by

⁷⁷ Tweedale. *Tweedale's Directory of Sheffield Cutlery Manufacturers 1740-2013*, p. 671

⁷⁸ Bailey. *Baileys' Northern Directory*, 1781 & Gales & Martin. *A directory of Sheffield*, 1787 and Robinson. *A directory of Sheffield*, 1797

⁷⁹ Sheffield Trade Directory Index, searchable at: <http://www.sheffieldrecordsonline.org.uk/>, <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/File:lm1814Wardle-Sheff-221.jpg> and Leader. *Reminiscences of old Sheffield*, pp.131-132

⁸⁰ Burke. *The MFT Quarterly*. Vol. 14, No.3. (1978) 1-7

accused cases of counterfeit, misuse of their corporate mark, and Wilson-named competition gives good insight how they marked their goods during this period. The earliest found announcement of this sort was published in an American newspaper during the fall of 1828.⁸¹ Like most ads of its kind, it contains a key of mark combinations to help the customer identify a genuine Wilson knife. One important conclusion drawn from these mark-keys is that ALL genuine Wilson products were marked with the four peppercorns and a diamond in some way. If these symbols are not included in the mark, it's not a genuine Wilson.

⁸¹ *American & Commercial Daily Advertiser*. Vol. LVIII. Sep 27 (1828).

Key to marks used during the rendezvous era, 1825-1840

In the spirit of John Wilson. Here follows a key to the different mark combinations that were stamped or claimed by the Wilson firm to be stamped on their products during the rendezvous era of the Rocky mountain fur trade.

 Four peppercorns and a diamond, or the “symbols mark”⁸². The freedom mark of Thomas Wilson from 1766 and used and claimed as the Wilson firm corporate mark until the very end of the brand in the 1900’s.

Announcements and advertisements published in 1828, 1831 and 1832 indicate it was struck on blades on its own, but no such specimen has been found for this study.⁸³ As this mark gives no information regarding steel quality it might have been used on all products specified on Butlers’ list from 1832.

In later announcements from 1839-1860’s the symbol mark is presented as the corporate mark of John Wilson and later John Wilson & Son, not as an individual mark stamped on steel.⁸⁴ The key to mark combinations usually accompanying these announcements combines the symbols with the name I.WILSON and sometimes quality indicators such as “SHEAR STEEL” as will be presented below. In 1878 it is registered as an individual mark again with the Cutlers’ Company.

I. WILSON  I.WILSON above the four peppercorns and diamond. Perhaps the most famous combination. Likely used as early as the 1810’s on to the early 1890’s, with clear documentation found for this paper from 1828 to 1878.⁸⁵ Charles Hanson refer to this mark as ...*the marking used by John Wilson during the rendezvous period*, and this study can only concur with that statement. Lee Burke calls this the “name and symbols mark”.⁸⁶

As this mark gives no indication regarding steel quality it might have been used on all products specified on Butlers’ list from 1832.



Butcher knife made by John Wilson bearing the name and symbols mark. 6 ½ inch blade. Courtesy Charlie Blomqvist

⁸² Burke. *The MFT Quarterly*. Vol. 14, No.3. (1978) 1-7

⁸³ Rees. *Butlers’ commercial list*, 86., *American & Commercial Daily Advertiser*. Vol. LVIII. Sep 27 (1828)., *NY Spectator*. Vol. XXXIV. Feb 11 (1831), *Portland Advertiser*. vol. 1. no. 60 (1831): 4 and *Louisville Journal*, Sep 5, 1863

⁸⁴ <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/images/f/f1/lm1839RobBir-JohnWilson1.jpg> & Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire.

⁸⁵ *American & Commercial Daily Advertiser*. Vol. LVIII. Sep 27 (1828). & Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire

⁸⁶ Hanson, Charles. *Book of Buckskinning* V. 65-80

 **I. WILSON** Another layout of the “name and symbols mark”. Just like the other combinations this shows up in documents from 1831 and 1832 but has disappeared in 1839.⁸⁷ No surviving knife or other product marked this way without the addition of quality below has been found.



Knife of unidentified pattern with the unframed cast steel mark. Courtesy Todd Dagget.

 **I. WILSON** Peppercorns, diamond and I. WILSON above **CAST STEEL** which is one out of three “symbols, name and quality” marks from the early period. From surviving examples this mark appears to have been popular on sharpening steels although Butlers’ List from 1832 lists many of Wilson’s cutlery products, including butcher knives, as available in cast steel. Showing up in documents from 1828-1850 but disappears in the early John Wilson & Son years to reappear again with an added frame in the 1860’s.⁸⁸

 **I. WILSON** Peppercorns, diamond and I. WILSON above **WARRANTED.** This mark is found illustrated in documents from 1828 to 1878.⁸⁹ The 1878 registration with the Cutlers’ Company contains two versions, with the second having a rectangular shaped frame which will be discussed later.



Leather cutting half moon knife marked with the unframed warranted mark. Courtesy Rick Tabor

Warranted is a vague but frequently used term insinuating *better quality* on Sheffield cutlery. In 1828, Wilson ensures all knives are made from warranted steel.⁹⁰ Butlers’ list from 1832 contains a number of Wilson products including butcher knives and *leather cutting half moon knives* like the one pictured as available in warranted quality.⁹¹

 **I. WILSON** Peppercorns, diamond and I. WILSON above **SHEAR STEEL** This combination has been found in documents consulted for this study from 1828 to at least 1852 arranged in this manner.⁹²

⁸⁷ *NY Spectator*. Vol. XXXIV. Feb 11 (1831). & *Portland Advertiser*. vol. 1. no. 60 (1831): 4, Rees. *Butlers’ commercial list*, 86. & <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/images/f/f1/Im1839RobBir-JohnWilson1.jpg>

⁸⁸ *American & Commercial Daily Advertiser*. Vol. LVIII. Sep 27 (1828)., White, Francis, & Co. *History, gazetteer, and directory, of Warwickshire*, 31 & *Louisville Journal*, Sep 5 (1863).

⁸⁹ *American & Commercial Daily Advertiser*. Vol. LVIII. Sep 27 (1828). & Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire

⁹⁰ *American & Commercial Daily Advertiser*. Vol. LVIII. Sep 27 (1828).

⁹¹ Rees. *Butlers’ commercial list*, 87.

⁹² *American & Commercial Daily Advertiser*. Vol. LVIII. Sep 27 (1828). & <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/images/9/91/Im1852SI-Wil2.jpg>



Example of a butcher knife with the unframed shear steel mark from the rendezvous era. Also notice the anomaly from Wilsons ordinary five or six cutler's pins. Source: Ebay

Surviving knives marked like this are rare. Lee Burke, who calls this mark *the apparent predecessor of the cartouche mark* (which is the same mark with an added rounded frame) appear to have found no surviving specimen for his 1978 article.⁹³

The lack of known survivors has even led to the speculation that this mark might even be the cartouche mark but illustrated wrong in the early printed sources.⁹⁴ The examples presented here, and another example from Jim Gordon's collection proves Burke right.⁹⁵ This is the predecessor of the cartouche mark.

Butlers' list only mentions *BREAD KNIVES, OR HOUSE KNIVES* available in shear steel, not butcher knives.⁹⁶ If this means butchers were not made from with shear steel in 1832, or just not mentioned has not been determined.



Example of the unframed shear steel mark from a plausible cook knife, that according to Butler's list from 1832 came in shear steel and with buck handles. Courtesy Michael Raunig, Raunig Art Enterprises Collection

All Knives, Steels, &c. made by JOHN WILSON, are marked in one of the following forms, and without one of such Marks none are genuine:—

I. WILSON
✠

✠ **I. WILSON**
CAST STEEL

✠ **I. WILSON**
WARRANTED

✠ **I. WILSON**
SHEAR STEEL

Part of an 1839 advertisement (Also on pg. 18). Source: Grace's Guide

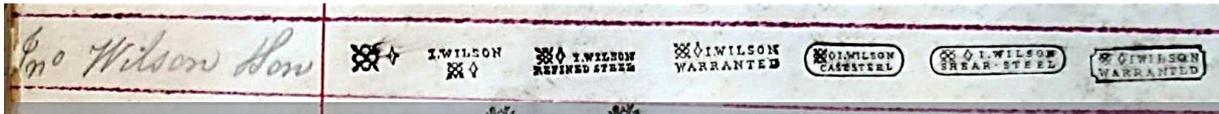
⁹³ Burke. *The MFT Quarterly*. Vol. 14, No.3. (1978): 1-7

⁹⁴ <http://www.scandinavianmountainmen.se/includes/misc/johnwilsonmarks1832.pdf>

⁹⁵ Gordon. *Great Knife Makers for the Early West*. 62

⁹⁶ Rees. *Butlers' commercial list*. 86

Key to late 19th century marks, 1850-1890



1878 trademarks registered to John Wilson & Son. By kind permission of the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire.



Peppercorns, diamond and I. WILSON above SHEAR STEEL with a rounded frame/cartouche. Called the “cartouche mark” by Lee Burke who could only date this mark as *probably post-1849* based on the documentation available at the time. The earliest reference to the framed/cartouche shear steel mark found for this study appears in an advertisement from John Wilson & Son that was published in American newspapers during the fall of 1863.⁹⁷ It was registered in the same company name at the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire in 1878 as pictures above.

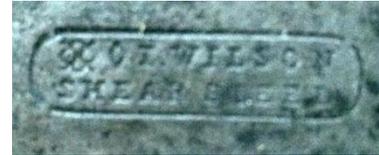
The cartouche mark frequently shows up on surviving butcher knives of various sizes.

A small deviation from some of the printed illustrations and the actual stamp found on surviving knives is that the frame or cartouche is incomplete leaving small spaces in each of the four corners. Why has not been determined.

Rex Norman who has written numerous articles on Rocky Mountain fur trade material culture calls the cartouche mark *Another early mark*.⁹⁸ The conclusion of this study is that it is not early enough to have seen use during the rendezvous period in the Rocky Mountains.



Peppercorns, diamond and I. WILSON above WARRANTED with a rectangular frame/cartouche with convex corners. Found in documents used for this study from 1863-1878.⁹⁹ No surviving knife or other product marked this way has been found for this study.



Framed shear steel or cartouche mark on butcher knife. Author's collection.

JOHN WILSON & SON,
Sycamore st., Sheffield, England,
MANUFACTURERS OF
SHOON KNIVES, BUTCHERS' KNIVES, BUTCHERS'
STEELS, BREAD KNIVES, QUINNERS'
KNIVES, FARRIERS' KNIVES, GLA-
ZIERS' KNIVES, PALETTE
KNIVES, &c.

NOTICE.
Most buyers of the above class of Goods will be aware that Messrs. JOHN WILSON & SON have had a special Agency for the sale of their Manufactures in the United States and Canada, through the medium of a house of which the founder of their firm, Mr. John Wilson, was, for many years, a principal partner. That partnership terminated, so far as Mr. Wilson was concerned, in 1849; and Messrs. John Wilson & Son beg respectfully to inform their friends, and buyers generally, that the Agency also has now ceased, and it is not their intention to appoint another; but they hope for a continuance of their orders, either through the house referred to or through other houses, with most or all of which Messrs. Wilson & Son have done business for a number of years.
The business of Messrs. JOHN WILSON & SON was established in the year 1750, and it is their determination, regardless of expense, to maintain the superior excellence of their manufactures, and thereby sustain the high reputation which they have, for so long a period, enjoyed.
Messrs. JOHN WILSON & SON invite special attention to the MARKING of their Goods. No ARTICLE is of their manufacture but such as is stamped with their Corporate Trade Mark
⊠ ⊠ (Four Peppercorns and a Diamond)—AN ADDITION TO THE NAME in one of the following forms:
I. WILSON ⊠ ⊠ I. WILSON ⊠ ⊠ I. WILSON
REFINED STEEL WARRANTED
⊠ ⊠ I. WILSON WARRANTED ⊠ ⊠ I. WILSON
SHEAR STEEL
and 48418

Advertisement from Louisville Journal, Sep 5, 1863, showing five various stamps.

⁹⁷ Louisville Journal, Sep 5, 1863.

⁹⁸ Norman. Muzzleloader Magazine. Sep/Oct (2003): 21-25

⁹⁹ Louisville Journal, Sep 5, 1863 & Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire



Peppercorns, diamond and I. WILSON above CAST STEEL with a rounded frame. Only found in the 1878 registration at the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire. No surviving knife or other product marked this way has been found for this study.



Peppercorns, diamond and I. WILSON above REFINED STEEL. This mark appears to be one of the first additions made when the company transformed to John Wilson & Son. It is found illustrated in documents from 1851-1878.¹⁰⁰

Pictured to the right is a farrier's knife stamped with the refined steel mark on the blade and an additional symbols mark on the base of the blade.

Refined steel appears to simply refer to steel that has been purified or improved in some manner.



Ricasso on farriers knifemarked with the symbols mark. Source: Ebay



Blade of the same farriers knife as above with the REFINED STEEL mark on the blade. Source: Ebay

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/images/3/3e/Im1851DirStaff-Wilson.jpg>, *Louisville Journal*, Sep 5, 1863 & Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire.

Turn of the century marks, 1890-1910

Having moved well beyond the intended timeframe for this study, this post 1890 section will be kept slim.


CAUTION TO IMPORTERS, DEALERS, AND USERS OF **JOHN WILSON'S**

 Celebrated "**PEPPERCORN & DIAMOND BRAND**" Butchers' Knives & Steels.

Butchers' Knives have been placed upon the Market bearing the name "WILSON" with, and without, the place of Origin "Sheffield, England," but **NO TRADE MARK.**

John Wilson therefore deems it important to point out that **NO** Goods are of his manufacture, unless they carry his well-known Trade Mark "**FOUR-PEPPERCORNS AND A DIAMOND**"  in addition to his name **I. WILSON**, in one of the following forms:—



WORKS:—SYCAMORE ST., SHEFFIELD, ENGLAND. SOLE AGENTS FOR U.S.A.:—MESSRS. HERMANN BOKER & CO., NEW YORK.

Advertisement from 1896 found in the periodical Iron Age.



Cartouche/framed shear steel combined with a SHEFFIELD ENGLAND stamp on a butcher knife. Source: Ebay

Perhaps the most significant change from this period when discussing marks on Wilson knives was the McKinley Tariff Act of 1890.¹⁰¹ This act meant that all goods imported to the US after March 1st 1891 was forced by law to be marked with the country of origin. The Wilson firm abided.



Name and symbols bark combined with a SHEFFIELD ENGLAND stamp on a butcher knife. Courtesy Rick Tabor

A likely theory is that the company first adapted to the new rules by adding SHEFFIELD ENGLAND as a second stamp combined with the marks still used from their 1878 registration at the Cutlers' Company. Simultaneously or shortly after the McKinley act they also started using new marks where SHEFFIELD ENGLAND was included in the same stamp.

The most famous of these later marks are perhaps the ones Burke calls the "triangular" and the somewhat later "truncated triangular mark".¹⁰² The earliest mention found for this study documenting the triangular mark is found in an 1896 American periodical named Iron Age (pictured above).¹⁰³

In the same advertisement SILVER STEEL has been added as another quality-mark. The same advertisement with an unchanged set of marks was republished again in the same magazine in 1897.¹⁰⁴



Excerpt from: Butchers' Advocate. Vol.37 No. 3 (1904) 3.

¹⁰¹ Northrup and Prange Turney. *Encyclopedia of Tariffs and Trade in U.S. History, Volym 3*, 236.

¹⁰² Burke. *The MFT Quarterly*. Vol. 14, No.3. (1978) 6

¹⁰³ *Iron Age*. Vol.57. Jan 9 (1896) 94

¹⁰⁴ *Iron age*. Vol.59 Jan 7 (1897) 90

In 1904 the company puts out a new advertisement in yet another American magazine. By now the WARRANTED, CAST STEEL, REFINED STEEL and the SILVER STEEL marks have disappeared, and the truncated triangular mark makes its likely first appearance.¹⁰⁵



Excerpt from: Butchers' Advocate. Vol.39 No. 1 (1905) 3.

In 1905 a similar advertisement is published, except it only shows the triangular and the truncated triangular marks, which indicates a total abandonment of the "old" marks from the previous



The triangular mark. Source: Ebay

century.¹⁰⁶ According to Burke the triangular and the truncated triangular mark were the last to be stamped with a mark punch. The succeeding marks of the 1900's were ...usually found to be etched or otherwise impressed by some late method.¹⁰⁷



The truncated triangular mark. Authors collection.

In the 1900's, when John Wilson & Company Ltd became a subsidiary under Joseph Elliot and Sons (Sheffield) Ltd, production eventually moved to Sylvester street. And so the direct connection between the Wilson brand and Sycamore street was lost and the trade mark was adapted by turning SYCAMORE ST into EX SYCAMORE ST on the last Wilson knives to be made. The details of marks used during the last decades of the Wilson brand will not be discussed here.

¹⁰⁵ *Butchers' Advocate. Vol.37 No. 3 (1904) 3*

¹⁰⁶ *Butchers' Advocate. Vol.39 No. 1 (1905) 3.*

¹⁰⁷ *Burke. The MFT Quarterly. Vol. 14, No.3. (1978) 6*

More to come

This is where this write up ends...for now. Much of the new information presented has been found online. New (or should it be old) sources keep being published on the web at an incredible rate, and that makes it hard to determine when to stop the chase and publish. A question being left unanswered today might be answered by a document found online tomorrow. In other words, the work of filling out the gaps of this study won't end here.

The first rows of this paper were written in 2009 after my first contact with Dr. Joan Unwin, archivist at the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire. Without her help and patience working through my never ending flood of questions, this would not have been possible. Thanks to Todd Glover I was able to purchase my first Wilson butcher in 2004. Thanks to Mikael Nilsson who has shared my obsession over the years and being responsible for a few more Wilson's in the Scandinavian Mountain Men collection. Thanks to all Brothers from the American Mountain Men and Scandinavian Mountain Men that has contributed in one way or the other. Thanks to all that have helped with information, discussions, and pictures from their private collections.

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