

WESTFIELD FORGE

By Patricia Lesley Stammers

Although my notion of forge and blacksmith was, mythically, derived until I met Rob Caley, family history did offer a tenuous, link. The wooden wagon wheels made by my great granddad were, probably, straked by the Westhall blacksmith. Anyway, hoping to gain recent information about Rob's highly skilled trade I travelled through villages, along lanes between ploughed fields and woodland to Westfield.

We met, briefly, by chance at Palgrave Vintage Fair in 2017. This time though, I hoped to have a closer look at the production process. After welcoming me Rob told how the business began following his visit to Fransham Forge.

"I was fascinated with smithing, convinced I ought to have a go. So, having shed space to spare in the garden I bought hearth, tools and fuel with which to experiment. Fortunately, the various techniques were mastered without trouble." He poked smoking coke that was piled on the hearth. "'Greenacres' was a smallholding inherited from my Dad and this building, known now as The Forge, once housed



ABOVE: Westfield Forge; BELOW LEFT: The Hearth.

his pigs."

As the smoke cleared, hearth, anvil, hammer, iron material of all shapes and sizes gained visibility. "I used to be a welder. Smithing was a hobby but then I began exhibiting pieces at country shows. Ipswich was the first and we were surprised how much interest people showed in our wares." Dawn, maker of wind chimes had, suddenly, appeared in the forge. She said, "People share their ideas with us and some give sketches of items they would like Rob or I to make for them."

Later she showed me some of her recent computer generated metalwork; meantime the other end of an iron rod pushed into the glowing heap rested on the hearth. "When it's hot enough I'll show you how a motif with which to decorate a hook is made," said Rob. Outside a stream trickled by under a bridge and collar doves cooed. Geese and goats wandered beneath the trees. Rob, hovering over the hearth and, occasionally, withdrawing the luminous iron was soon satisfied. "That's hot enough," he said placing red end on nearby, anvil and picking up



Metal Animal Motifs

the hammer.

Silvery, iron oxide flakes formed and fell as he beat the end and gradually, a delicate, veined leaf formed. "The trick is learning to regulate your grip on the hammer. That takes a while."

"This is a balcony he's making for a client," said Dawn as she guided me across the forge. "The fancy iron brackets were supplied by the client and Rob made the frame in which they will all stand." She did not say if he had yet been commissioned to recreate the Forth Bridge or Eiffel Tower ... maybe next year.

"Our son shares The Forge with us. So at present I'm allotted an area here and there, wherever there's space but..." She smiled. "I'll soon be moving next door into a custom made workshop."

Metal medallions depicting hedgehog, rabbit, tree, flower, that she had made, rested on wire grids. "I use





Rob the Blacksmith

heat to colour them.” She switched on a propane blow-torch. “Steel changes colour when heated, you see.” Rainbow shades began to glow on the metal hedgehog. “Currently, the designs are taken from Mabs & Wall at the Etsy online shop but now I can afford to buy a plasma cutter and create new motifs.”

While pointing and walking to a lean-to at the side of the forge she said, “This is the Spray Booth.” Beautiful, metal medallions were

hanging in the shadows. “I lacquer-spray them to prevent rust. “The hare looking at the moon is one of the most popular wind-chime design.”

Seems there is more than a touch of magic created at Westfield Forge, where Dawn and Rob transform visions into finely, crafted items of practical and aesthetic appeal. A log basket to fit the inglenook, tinkling wind-chimes suspended from fancy, metal medallions, weather vane, decorative garden arch and smaller



ABOVE: Heat is Applied to Metal Rabbit

LEFT: Hedgehog Wind Chime Motif



items: drink holder, bottle opener, horseshoe take shape. Thus an ancient skill which is thought to have originated c.1500 BC when Hittites began iron smelting is preserved today in forges such as this.

■ **Rob and Dawn Caley,**
Westfield Forge, ‘Greenacres’,
Dereham Road, Westfield,
Dereham, Norfolk NR19 1QG
01362 820214
www.westfieldforge.com
www.facebook.com/WestfieldForge