

The Traveller Tinsmith



Tinsmithing is a trade that is associated with Irish Travellers giving rise to the name 'Tinker' as an alternative name for Travellers particularly in the 1900s.

The tinsmith was a welcome and valued visitor providing much needed goods as well as bringing news. Often a barter system was in operation and the tinsmith would work in exchange for food and clothing.

The Traveller tinsmith would work on site on a farmyard or at the camp at side of the road where soldering irons could be kept hot.

The tinsmith made and repaired household items such as cups, lanterns, candle holders, plates, kettles, cans, tubs, buckets and many more.

Broken earthenware might also be put back together with pieces of wire, and some tinsmiths repaired items such as clocks and umbrellas.

The tinsmith carried his tools around with him in a box called a 'budget'. The tinsmith's tools include a tin cutter, rivet hammer, scutcher and special anvils.

Part of the process of making a can includes making the seam and 'turning the buff' before making the bottom and adding the 'lugs' or handle. The whole process takes about 15 minutes.

Hand-made rivets were made from waste bits of tin about 1" square. To make a rivet one of these squares was curved diagonally and rolled into the shape of a cone by being tapped with the hammer on the anvil.

It was then put through a hole in the nail tool and hammered inwards and downwards to form a head and give a rivet measuring about 1" in length.

Rivets of this type appear to have a long history in Ireland. They occur in ancient repair work on the Ballyvariscal later bronze age cauldron (now in the Cork Museum) and in the repair of the biconical bronze cauldrons from Ballymoney and Uringford, both in the National Museum of Ireland, probably belonging to the first or second century A.D.

Tin objects are often decorated using a system of punching.



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