

The young apprentice cabinetmaker who became a connoisseur

Antique Woodworking Tools

Their Craftsmanship from the Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century

David R. Russell

with Photographs by James Austin



***Antique Woodworking Tools: Their Craftsmanship from the Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century* by David R. Russell. Published by John Adamson, £90. ISBN 978-1-898565-05-5.**

DAVID Russell began collecting tools more than 30 years ago when he chanced upon a Norris plane on a stand at an antiques market in Charnock Richard. It reminded him of the workshop in Kendal where he had been apprenticed to a cabinetmaker and forbidden to touch the Norris planes. He bought it for £5.

From this small beginning his tool collection grew until it was more than capable of filling this 520-page volume with over 1500 illustrations.

This is a truly huge work, weighing nearly nine pounds (4kg), and is quite unrivalled in the size and quality of its illustrations, which are the work of James Austin. He has managed to capture the elusive qualities of balance, texture and patina which make the finest tools a pleasure to handle, frequently lifting them into the realm of folk art.

While the illustrations are of a quality to inspire new collectors, the text does assume a fair amount of knowledge on the part of the reader.

Each section is prefaced by some interesting insights, such as the chapter on moulding planes where it is explained how the importation of softer Baltic pine in place of oak after the Great Fire of London encouraged the creation of more complex mouldings and thus a proliferation of planes.

This book does not set out to be a comprehensive introduction or a guide for those trying to puzzle out how and when all these tools would have been used. However, for the established collector, David Russell has created an incomparable catalogue of a major collection that does indeed include some very scarce and costly items.

He has recorded in fine detail the maker's marks wherever they appear, and his appendix of such marks on plane irons runs to an unprecedented 269 illustrations.

At the same time, the breadth of his interest demonstrates an interest in tools that goes beyond rare variations of form among the Norris planes and Marples *Ultimatum* braces which can become an obsession.

The earliest pieces in this collection go back to the early Stone Age, illustrating that the need for effective cutters, choppers and scrapers is as old as man himself. From Bronze Age axes, he moves on to the Iron Age and the Roman period and there are medieval and later anvils, adzes and axes.

The author has lived in France for many years and some of the more decorative Continental pieces in the collection reveal an aesthetic eye to rival the collector's passion. The double-page spread showing his complete collection of European plumb bobs is a thing of beauty, a reminder that, for the craftsmen of the past, tools were of more than utilitarian value.