

# The Making of a Mess

The story of the mess made by making a tool

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## Introduction

Several years ago, I decided that Grimmsfield needed a forge and that I was going to try my hand at blacksmithing. This proved to be a very VERY dirty occupation. The forge has slowly grown to take over my 2 car garage and has left its mark on everything, not just my hands. This will be the story of the mess created in making a medieval froe.



## Description

In order to create a billhook (documentation attached), a coal fire must be created to heat the metal for shaping, various files and grinders must be employed to help shape the metal. A wooden handle must be carved out of a block of wood and this must be shaped and sanded. All of these allow me to create quite a fine mess.

## Historical Use

Historically, most forging was done either open air or in a covered space. This allowed the breezes to carry off the dust, dirt and smoke from the forging process away. Often a forge was created on the spot from rocks and clay with bellows attached for air flow. The anvil was much smaller and attached to a large log for working on. This forced blacksmithing to be a fair weather activity.



Image from <https://regia.org/research/life/ironwork.htm>

## Construction(or how I get dirty)

The start of the dirtying of the blacksmith seems to start even before the fire is lit. I start my forge with crumpled up newspaper and the very act of this deposits some ink on my hands.



Once the paper is added, coal needs to be placed in the forge and piled around the paper. Most of this is done with a coal rake and coal bin, but the final pile works best by hand.





After this the blower needs to be oiled. My blower is a champion 400 from the 1930 and leaks oil like a sieve. This results in a patch of loveliness on the floor that is slowly growing. I seem to be able to keep the oil from being deposited on my hands or clothes about 50 % of the time.



Once that is done, it's time to light the forge! This involves setting the paper on fire with a blowtorch then cranking the blower to get the coal to catch. Until the chimney on the forge begins to draw, this fills the shop/garage with smoke. Because of the nature of burning coal, it is a very oily smoke which fills the shop and covers everything.



The dust, oil and grit from this slowly coats everything









Once all the blacksmithing is done , its time to work on the handle. This involves turning a hickory log on the lathe which tends to throw up just a bit of wood chips: After this comes the filing and sanding wich again coats everything with a fine dust. This mixed with the oily deposits

from the coal in the forge will often combine to form a wonderful paste that stick to everything.



## Conclusion

Blacksmithing is a dirty job that I would not trade for anything!

