



Rotary knife cleaner made by George Kent Ltd. of High Holborn between 1887-1903.

The design was patented on the 12 June 1844. George Kent also made whisks, sifters, strainers and even washing machines. His knife cleaning machine won a number of accolades and was sold internationally.

Kent's Knife Cleaner

In 1913, Harry Brearley, a metallurgist at Firth Brown Laboratories in Sheffield discovered a type of steel that was resistant to stains and corrosion. He quickly realised it's potential for cutlery but unfortunately, Firth's directors were a bit short-sighted and refused to apply for a patent. So Brearley approached a firm of cutlers in Sheffield called Messrs. R.E. Mosely and the first range of stainless-steel cutlery was produced the following year.

The invention was quite a breakthrough because until then, knives were made of carbon steel.

Food acids, such as vinegar caused the blades to rust and so they had to be polished every day on a knifeboard to stop them corroding. More fortunate folk invested in a rotary knife cleaner, a wooden contraption with iron feet which came in eight or nine different sizes. The knife cleaner at

Eden Valley Museum is the smallest model and has slots for three knives and a carver which had to be polished separately. Emery powder was poured into a chute at the side.

Knife cleaners had to be handled with care and some of the earlier versions were liable to blunt or trap knives if the 'winder' was overly enthusiastic. When the handle was turned, the wooden discs inside the drum were set in motion. The discs were covered in bristles and leather strips which rubbed over the knives as the drum rotated. The task took a while because knives of a certain size could only be polished together.

The model at Eden Valley Museum originally served the St Andrew's Convent in Edenbridge. Elsie Maynard, who once worked at the convent, bought the knife cleaner for use at the Queen's Arms in Cowden Pound. The knife cleaner was discovered in the attic of the pub many years later by Leigh's, a local firm of builders who were carrying out work to the roof. At the time, Mr Leigh's son, David was busy collecting artefacts for his Boy Scout badge. So, he asked Elsie if he might have the knife cleaner for his son's collection. Elsie was only too delighted because she was very keen to clear the roof space. David's collection eventually outgrew his bedroom and so the artefacts were rehoused in a special shed built by his father and named it 'David's

Museum'. The shed was eventually disbanded some years later but the objects were salvaged, and the knife cleaner was loaned to Eden Valley Museum.