

Podcast Transcript for Smashing Metal

Alex:

We've got the forge going, kept some going, as you can see. And then once we've got that, obviously we choose what metal we want to use. If it's something like a hook, it might be a bit of round bar, like about five, you know, five mil round bar.

So we'd obviously cut to the length that we'd want and then we'd have to put it into the coals, hot coals.

When it gets, you know, a bright orange hot, we take it out with the tongs and then we start, if it was a hook, for instance, what we do is reduce that round bar down into a point and then the other end that we turn it into like what we call a fishtail, where we spread it out.

We've got certain pliers that we can use that we can make scrolls with and kind of twist the pointed ends around to make a little scroll. So that would be like if you were making a hook or whatever, for instance.

So really that's it, really. It's about like, But they call it, upsetting the metal. That's what they call it. So once the metal is hot, it's quite pliable. It's almost like, you know, almost like plasticine in a way. So, you know, as long as you're working with it in that state, then, you know, quite malleable. There's quite a lot you can do with it.

Hayley:

Alongside Made in the Middle, Craftspace have been collecting making stories from across the Midlands.

Today we took a trip to Smashing Metal, a blacksmithing group run by Newbiggin Community Trust.

Alex:

Hi, I'm Alex and I work for Newbiggin Charity. And this is one of the projects, the blacksmithing projects, which I'm running at the moment. We're called Smashing Metal and we work mainly with, we work with guys and then we started to work with women as well.

It's mostly people, clients who come through our community, hub at Lodge Road. And, it's a good opportunity for people to like, kind of, you know, do a bit of

mindfulness, really, to like, take. Take them away from the problems and learn a skill.

Well, we've been going now, I think it's about, about three years now. We've been doing a couple hours a week. So it's not that intensive, but I'm hoping to do more sessions eventually build up and do more sessions, more workshops and go around and be more inclusive, taking the portable forge out to all the projects and doing stuff out there.

When I first came here during the, during the beginning of lockdown. I was unemployed at the time. I met Angie, who I was running the project. We just happened to be having a little conversation, and she mentioned that she'd been on a blacksmithing course.

And I said, oh, that's interesting because I remember when I was at school and I did a tiny little bit of blacksmithing, I really loved it. And she said, okay, why don't we get you trained up? Then you can do blacksmithing and train other people. So that's how it began, really.

We've got a couple of young guys, youth, that we trained as well. There's a guy called Oli. He couldn't make it today, unfortunately, but he's pretty good now, you know, I mean, and he sometimes takes, you know, he teaches people as well.

We tended to make stuff before, like stuff for the garden, and supports, things like hooks, you know, little scroll hooks.

And first project that we worked on, we worked with the police, where we took knives from the police and then we made them into flowers.

So at the church on Lodge Road, we've actually got, there's two big bouquets either side of the front door which we made out of those knives that we got off the police. We did a few markets at Moseley, their craft market. We did quite well. We sold quite a lot of stuff again, hooks, candles, stick holders, just small, really small things like that. So it's more about developing technique, getting people to learn the techniques and stuff like that. We're hoping to work, on larger projects, you know, eventually, and that's what I would like to do really. You know, take it, take it to a more art, kind of more down the art route.

I enjoy just experimenting myself personally, when it's my time, I just like to play and just try and make organic kind of forms and things like that, you know, learning technique again.

It's all about for me at the moment still, you know, I'm still learning. So I'm trying to make poppies and things like that at the moment, you know, quite delicate things, which I'm finding quite a challenge, out of iron, you know. Yeah, I've got a few ideas really, what I want to do with those and that.

So I'm always interested in, in getting involved in, different aspects and craft and how I can use that for my own, you know. All this goes back to being a little kid, you know, drawing on the wallpaper and all that kind of thing. You know, I've always had that, like to make things.

I think everyone that comes through and does it really, really gets something out of it. They really enjoy it. You know, they forget about the problems, because obviously you need to focus when you're working with like hot metal.

With some of them been really good, made really good stuff, which we've actually sold and put the money back into the project.

I think a lot of it is from a mindful point of view, you know what I mean? Giving someone an activity and also from them, it does actually build up your strength. Because I was quite weak when I started it. And I found like by doing it, my you know, my joints and my hands and my, everything's improved, you know, I've really, it's improved from that point of view.

We have all kinds of cultures here. We've got people from Afghanistan, we've got Czech, Jamaican, obviously. I've got my own Jamaican, Irish heritage. My dad was a carpenter, so he was obviously he worked with his hands and stuff like that and I think that influenced me a lot growing up, just watching him working and stuff like that, you know.

Yeah, I'm sure people can like, if they, you know, can put their hand to this, if they work with their hands, you know. I mean, you find that some people naturally, you know, take to it.

[Music]

Hayley:

This podcast was produced by Craftspace, for Stories of Making and Migration, a project sitting alongside our current touring exhibition Made in the Middle, funded by Arts Council England.

We met with makers across the Midlands. They are everyday makers who craft for themselves. This could be making at home in a local studio with a community group as a form of activism for their well being or much more.

You can view more stories from this project on the Craftspace website with podcasts, photos and short films. Visit <https://craftspace.co.uk/mitm-making-stories/>.

We're also on social media so let us know your own making stories and journeys through craft. We'd love to hear from you.