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PAST & PRESENT
OF A WORLD-FAMOUS
CRICKET BAT FIRM



GUNN & MOORE, LTD.
Carrington St., NOTTINGHAM, Eng.

The Past and Present of a Famous Cricket Bat Concern.

A Visit to Messrs. Gunn & Moore's Nottingham Factory.

Nestling under the shadow of Nottingham Castle—a Roman fortress known to thousands, if only from the fact that it forms a pictorial embellishment on a carton in which a popular brand of cigarettes reaches us—is a factory respected wherever cricket is

it was difficult to visualise that before many weeks rolled by, on some of what were now ice-bound fields, flannelled and perspiring cricketers would reign supreme.

But once in the Carrington Street offices of Messrs. Gunn & Moore, Ltd., the pro-



Store Yard showing Willow being riven up for 1925 Season.

played. It is the birthplace of all cricket bats bearing the famous stamp of "Gunn and Moore."

So familiar is the name of this firm to the sports trade all the world over, that when we received an invitation to visit Nottingham for the purpose of obtaining some particulars for an article to appear in the SPORTS TRADER, we felt that an interesting day was before us. And we were not disappointed.

As we sped our way to Robin Hood's country through a frost-whitened countryside,

spect seemed nearer realisation. The sunshiny welcome accorded us, and the atmosphere of cricket which pervaded, made this so. Even as we exchanged salutations, the portrait of "W.G.," that bearded G.O.M. of cricket, looked down upon us. Prominent personalities in present-day phase of the game were brought to mind when we were given the opportunity of glancing over several letters recently received by the firm. Without exception, these conveyed one message—an unstinted commendation of the bats which

A Famous Cricket Bat Concern—continued.

the writers had obtained from the factory we had come to see.

It illustrated the point that G. & M.'s bats had lost none of their popularity since the day when Ranjitsinhji sang their praise.

While waiting for one of the staff to escort us to the factory, we were provided at our request with a few notes on the origin of the firm, which is now on the eve of its fortieth year of establishment.

One of the founders was the late William Gunn. Gunn made his first acquaintance

was destined to be so honourably associated in later years; in fact, it may be written that he was one of its mainstays until his retirement in 1904.

Although Gunn made a front rank place for himself as a player, he did not banish all thoughts of the trade from his mind. The year 1885 saw his return; it was a joint enterprise in which his partner was Mr. T. J. Moore.

It will be seen that the House of Gunn & Moore was built on a practical foundation. That, perhaps, has been the secret of its



Blade Making, Hammering and Pressing Shop.

with the sports trade at the age of fourteen, when he entered the service of Richard Daft. It was only in the capacity of assistant, but he soon disclosed a quick perception for a good piece of willow, and his advice made him many firm friends among the notable cricketers of the day who frequented Daft's shop.

But Gunn was not only a judge of a bat; he could use one too. So he decided to launch out into the active field of cricket. As one of the Colts of England, he was given a trial by Notts—a county with which he

steady success. Even to-day, the fortunes of the firm are controlled by men who have spent their lives in the business, as the following illustrates.

Numbered among the first employees of Messrs. Gunn & Moore were Messrs. J. G. Eite, W. Sherwin, J. Stirland and R. Bloor. These four members are still with the firm, and are all actively engaged in its successful working. Surely there are few, if any, houses in the sporting goods trade that can claim such a record of service on the part of their employees.

The failing light of a January afternoon

ous Cricket Bat Concern—continued.

ded us that if we were to make a complete
tion of the workshops, we must cut short
ay in the office; so we made our way to
m Street, Castle Boulevard, where the
y is situated.

re we met the works manager, who was to
our guide. And a right informative one
ved, ready with an answer to every question.
e factory comprises several large shops
ng a giant "A" enclosing two yards. A
or so ago an extension was added in order
ord better facilities for coping with the
ncreasing demand for Messrs. Gunn &
e's productions. But notwithstanding
the problem has not been entirely solved.
nsequence, the supplies of the G. & M.
or bats has still to be rationed. However,
oming season, we were informed, should
far larger proportion of the orders com-
—welcome news, indeed, for the trade.
expressing a desire to follow the evolu-
of the bats from the raw material to the
ed article, we were first conducted to the
where the willow is stocked.

anyone who handles G. & M.'s bats will
y appreciate, the firm are meticulous in
election of their timber.

h material as would satisfy in many
rs is ruthlessly discarded. The firm
consolidated such a reputation for high-
productions that they dare not jeopardise
working up anything but willow that will
be the most exacting bat user.

soon found that our guide had a critical
edge of what good bat willow should
is long experience in the factory, backed
ears spent in inspecting the estates, has
him a perceptive buyer. He does not
r willow that has been forced on plan-
s; rather does he seek naturally developed
izable trees, such as are still to be found
ghout the country. With the object of
ning for such trees, he travels far and
and it often happens that once he has
d down a quarry it is many years before
chase can be negotiated. Sometimes his
es result in a handsome reward. One
was the case first previous to our visit to
actory. He had secured a number of trees
ing a quality that elicited eulogies even
this expert buyer. "They are," he said
evident pride, "the finest I have ever
' The exciting occupations of prospecting
old or rummaging of Egyptian antiquities
n pretty close by the willow hunter; so
he does capture a prize one may well for-
his elation.

"Is there a danger of an exhaustion of the
supplies of high-grade willow?" was a ques-
tion we asked.

"We have often feared so," was the reply,
"but somehow or other every year seems to
bring its quota." Our guide tapped a little note-
book that protruded from his pocket—a book
in which there was evidently some valuable in-
formation regarding the location of trees
marked down for future buying. "In many
instances," he continued, "we have to exercise
patience. Owners of estates are loth to have
certain trees on their estates felled—yes, for
sentimental reasons usually; but estates change
hands—and then comes the opportunity."

In the yard in which we were now standing
were stacks upon stacks of clefts—streets of
them, one might say. It was a sight to raise
the little green god of envy in the breast of
many a bat maker, for not only was there
quantity, but—what is more important still—
quality too.

As we wended our way round the stacks our
guide pulled out several clefts at random, dis-
playing the faces so as to show the whiteness
of the wood and the beauty of the grain.

Most of the clefts stored in this yard were
in reserve for the 1925 season. It is the policy
of the firm never to work up a cleft until it has
had at least a year's seasoning. This necessi-
tates a careful estimate of future requirements,
for, although willow improves by keeping, it
is not advisable to harbour it indefinitely. After
a certain period it begins to lose its nature.

So vast is the stock of willow held by the
firm that they find constant employment for
several men in the yards, shifting the clefts
from the open to the drying sheds, as the time
they have been seasoning demands.

In the course of our travels, we were shown
some reserves of special clefts which had been
singled out owing to their outstanding
qualities.

In consequence of the fact that even the
second quality bats manufactured by Messrs.
Gunn & Moore are fashioned from willow of a
superior class, they are forced to weed out
many clefts which for some reason or another
are not considered in harmony with their
standard. These are sold and find a ready
demand from smaller bat makers.

Cane is another primary element in the bat,
and with regard to this Messrs. Gunn & Moore
are very favourably situated. They purchase
as much as from ten to fifteen tons of prime,
soft, Sarawak at a time; sometimes they take
whole shipments.



Handle Making Shop.



One of the Finishing Shops.

A Famous Cricket Bat Concern—continued.

Having seen the materials from which the G. & M. bats are made, we next directed our attention to the actual processes of manufacture.

First came the shaping of the rough clefts. This was being performed by hand, although machinery is often employed by other firms. The dominance of manual over mechanical means is one of the outstanding features of the Gunn & Moore factory.

Some there are who entertain the idea that cricket bats can be turned out like so many

Messrs. Gunn & Moore are fortunate in having in their employ many craftsmen who have, to all intents and purposes, been born and bred in the firm; they are therefore deeply steeped in the G. & M. traditions; the imperative necessity of the finer points of form that are such a marked characteristic of their bats.

On our way to the drying sheds, where thousands of dry blades were lying ready for immediate use, we passed the incinerator in which all the waste products—shaving, etc.—are turned to steam for heating. Machinery does not play a very important part in the fac-



Stock Room showing Finished Bats.

stair banisters. This is the very antithesis of Messrs. Gunn & Moore's principle. They maintain—and rightly too—that a bat worthy of the name should possess individuality; that ineffable quality of "feel" which can only be imparted by an expert craftsman. Willow is a naturally grown substance; no two pieces are alike, even should they be part and parcel of the same tree. It takes the human hand to turn it to the best advantage, to preserve its merits and to mitigate its little failings. This is where the most ingenious mechanical device is impotent; it lacks the power of discernment.

tory, but that installed is operated by a gas engine and electricity.

The saw-mill was our next objective. It is to this department that the blades are taken after they are marked off. Here we observed a piece of machinery lying derelict. On enquiry we found that it was a mechanical device that had been installed at considerable expense, but discarded in favour of hand labour. This was just one indication of the firm's determination to sacrifice speed if it was opposed to efficiency.

From here we were taken to the blade-mak-

A Famous Cricket Bat Concern—*continued.*

ing shop, where the blades could be seen assuming a more definite shape under the deftly manipulated draw knives. The degree of skill required to bring a bat up to the desired weight, and at the same time make it conform to the G. & M. standards is by no means small. A worker must judge to a nicety how much wood is to be left on the drive. Every piece of willow calls for a fresh estimate. If it is light, it is easily conceivable that more wood can be left without transcending the limits set by the scale. That is one of the advantages derived from the utilisation of the best material.

Perfection in shape and balance may be said to be the hall-mark of Messrs. Gunn & Moore's bats, and the efforts made to ensure these attributes were fully manifested in the finishing shop. One could not fail to admire the harmony of the curves, the subtle rounding of the back, and the delicate hollow-ground effect below the shoulders. Even the sand-papering calls for no little deftness of touch and appreciation of form.

After the blades are shaped they are hand-hammered and pressed. The latter operation takes place two or three times before a bat is finished, and it is by no means a minor procedure in the evolution. The special machine on which it takes place—the invention of the Works' Manager by the way—is capable of exerting a pressure of $3\frac{1}{2}$ tons.

The handle-making shop provided with another interesting demonstration of the care taken to ensure that every component of the bats should be equal in quality. Prime Sarawak cane was lying in various lengths according to whether they were intended for men's or youths' bats. These were gathered together in a bundle, and after the insertion of the rubber strips, glued and bound with cord.

Our guide explained why it was certain rubber was used in the handles. Many kinds had been tried, but that which they were at present using was found to give the best results. Some rubber is too resilient for cushioning the handle, with the result that the bat became too "whippy." The medium course was the best, and that was the endeavour of Messrs. Gunn & Moore.

When the handles were set they were planed into shape for insertion in the blades. One of the notable points in the G. & M. bats is the neat way in which the handles are inserted;

there is no gap, however small, to be seen at the bottom of the splice.

The blades are prepared for the handles on a splice cutter. We saw this in operation and observed the clean way it performed its work. This machine was one instance where the mechanical could compete with hand labour. The binding of the handles brought the bats to completion.

One of the things which impressed us during our tour of the shops was the fact that all the bats received an equal measure of care in manufacture. Special hands were not singled out for the making of any particular grade of bat; the seconds and the under-sized models were treated in identically the same manner. There was no distinction; so youths and users of the club class of bat may be assured that their bats are made by the same craftsmen as produce the more exclusive superiors for County and Test Match players.

Confirmation of this was to be had in the grading shop. The bats were classed in one category or another entirely on their merits as they stood.

Each bat was given a thorough inspection for any imperfections in workmanship or materials which might have escaped the vigilance of the hands through which they had passed. Those showing a pure white blade were accorded the honour of bearing the "William Gunn Autograph" stamp. Bats bearing the slightest speck or stain, although equal in make, were relegated to the second class. Of course, the "butterfly" is not detrimental to the blade—in fact, some of the foremost players prefer to see it—but there is such a deep-rooted prejudice existing among the public and the trade against the stain that Messrs. Gunn & Moore have decided that their "Supers" should be unblemished. We ourselves observed how carefully the grading of the bats was being carried out.

"If the players could only be brought to realise it, they secure just as good a bat as could be desired in the 'Cannon' series," said a member of the firm, when later we were chatting in the office; "but they will have our 'Supers.' Pure white willow of the right sort is at a premium, so we—although reluctantly—have to restrict our supply of 'Autograph Specials.' However, we trust we shall be in a better position to supply this year. But at the same time, we should appreciate a larger share of mixed orders."

Our final call was at the store room. Here

A Famous Cricket Bat Concern—continued.

were bats in their thousands, all in paper envelopes and methodically graded in the racks that lined the room and were placed beneath the ceiling. As great as the reserve stock was—some fifteen thousand bats—we were informed that they were already booked by dealers in this country and in the Colonies; for Messrs. Gunn & Moore do an extensive export business. In this store could be seen some representative examples of the celebrated—and, incidentally, much sought after—“William Gunn Autograph” bats, such as are

cricket bats, the Nottingham firm have two other lines which call for remark, viz., hockey sticks and tennis rackets.

Tennis is comparatively a new departure with the firm. Its inception was due to the numerous enquiries received from their customers. Although the department has been established only about two years, the range produced has already made a strong reputation.

The principal model is the “Portland de Luxe”—which is named after the Duchess of Portland. This is an attractive racket in a grade that does every credit to the makers. It



Corner of Tennis Shop.

being used by the leading players, as well as every University and college team; also we observed the “Cannon” treble-spring-handle models, which are made in both long and short handle patterns, the numerous match and practice bats, and the range produced for youths. Messrs. Gunn & Moore were pioneers in the supplying of youths’ bats in a quality equal to that demanded by skilled players, and as their reward, they include practically all the principal colleges in the Kingdom among their clients.

Although we have confined our article to the

has an English rent ash frame, double bound at the shoulders with black and white gut. The stringing is carried out with Tracey’s famous gut. This also appears in the “Portland” Hexagon, which comes out a shade lower in price. Others on the list are the “Special” and “Trent.” We saw these rackets in the tennis department and can testify to the care bestowed on their making.

Yet another item of sports equipment produced in the G. & M. factory are hockey sticks. The “Autograph” and “Cannon” Bulgars are too widely known to necessitate any lengthy

A Famous Cricket Bat Concern—*continued.*

tribute to their perfect balance, shape and the soundness of the materials employed in their construction. Sticks for junior use are also supplied.

Having completed our round of the factory, we returned to Carrington Street.

During a final conversation, the topic of the modern practice of stamping bats with some well-known cricketer's signature arose.

Gunn & Moore, we were reminded, were among the first cricket concerns to market autographed bats; but they have never found it necessary to subsidise any cricketer for the

use of his name. They rely upon the quality of their productions; they stand or fall by merit, and merit alone.

As the "Autograph" and "Cannon" bats were introduced nearly forty years ago, we think the policy has been endorsed in no uncertain fashion by the sporting goods dealers and those who play our national summer game.

With practical men at the helm of a business so sound in its dealings, the House of Gunn & Moore, Ltd., should follow its honoured past with a great future.

At any rate, such is the impression which lingers after a visit to this world-famous cricket bat concern



Choice Purchase of Willow Trees for "Superior Autograph" Bats.