



HOW TO COMMISSION A BLACKSMITH

Thank you for enquiring about commissioning ironwork from a working blacksmith. We have a selection of blacksmiths across the country that can help you.

The Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths does not endorse specific blacksmiths but does have award-winning smiths with Bronze, Silver and Gold medals awarded to blacksmiths across the country for their outstanding craftsmanship. We encourage you to find a blacksmith that makes bespoke work that fits your requirements.

Commissioning a piece of decorative ironwork is a two-way process – you will work closely with your chosen blacksmith towards an outcome. Your piece of bespoke ironwork is a legacy piece that will last many lifetimes. Finding the right blacksmith for your project is important so we have written this guide to help you.

1. Write a brief for your project.

Outline what you want. For example: a double leaf gate with pillars, automated, integral deadlock with dog bars/rabbit bars, traditional scroll work and an overthrow with coat of arms gilded. Or for example: an exterior window grill, hinged, second storey, contemporary design, based on nature, coloured paint finish.

Include details like the location, time frame, any access restrictions for installation, any planning requirements, and your ball-park budget. You could also include photographs of the location or architect drawings.

Anticipate a pre-commissioning site visit – this could be you visiting the blacksmith or the blacksmith visiting your site. Ask the blacksmith if there is a charge for a site visit.

Some projects require approved contractors for installation - specifically on public highways, this detail should be included in your brief.

2. Research; Find blacksmiths online & at County Shows & Country Fairs or Open Studios.

When choosing a blacksmith look at examples of their work – this will tell you what their style is and should help you find a blacksmith that works in a style that is right for your project.

Also consider location; extra time and costs travelling to site can impact on the project. When you have a short list of blacksmiths that work in a style that fits your project, approach them with a quick phone call followed up by an email with your brief.

Online platforms like Etsy, Pinterest, Houzz etc. can help in your research.

3. Design – do you have a design or want a design created for you?

You may already have a design for a specific location but be aware that the design might need altering to fit and this is part of the process.

Some blacksmiths only work to their own designs and have built their professional reputation around this, they might have a portfolio of design work you can see as well as completed projects. The right blacksmith can add to your project with experience, ideas and skills to make it work better.

Remember that blacksmiths charge for their design time as an integral part of their profession. Some projects could pay 3 shortlisted blacksmiths to produce design ideas



then award the commission to the favoured design. The WCB does not endorse pro bono design work from blacksmiths.

4. Traditional or Contemporary Decorative Ironwork.

Choose a blacksmith that makes the style of work you want by looking at their website/portfolio.

Some blacksmiths specialise in heritage blacksmithing work – the traditional style of forged ironwork you see in and around listed or heritage buildings. This could be multiple scroll work and repoussé leaf work for example and is often a requirement on heritage projects. There are specialist blacksmith that work in this style.

Other projects require a more contemporary designed item of decorative ironwork to fit a specific building scheme or style of development so look for a blacksmith that can work in this way.

5. Materials.

The commonly forged metals for decorative and artistic forge-work are: Mild Steel, Wrought Iron, Stainless Steel and Bronze.

Pure Iron, High Carbon Steel, Titanium, Brass, Copper and Aluminium can also be forged although most often as a specialist incorporated pieces.

Ensure that the metal chosen is appropriate for the design, budget, location (corrosion protection) and forging process.

For more detailed information on materials – please see appendix.

6. Time.

Allow time for your project. The handmade process of blacksmithing takes time and many blacksmiths work alone. When planning your ironwork consider contacting blacksmiths at the start of your project planning process to check their availability and lead times – many blacksmiths have long lead times for their work and the more traditional forged elements in the design, the longer it can take to make the work.

Consider the time it might take to apply for planning permission with certain projects and incorporate that into your timeline.

7. Finishes.

The blacksmith that you work with will help you make the right choice of finish for the piece you are commissioning depending on its location – interior or exterior. If it is a traditional heritage piece, it might require gilding. Include this in the brief you give the blacksmith.

Many exterior pieces of ironwork can be hot dip galvanized or hot zinc sprayed prior to painting, you can discuss these options with the blacksmith to find the most appropriate for you commission.

Ask the blacksmith for a maintenance schedule outlining cleaning recommendation and touch up paint colour/type.



8. Budget.

Discuss budgets early on with your blacksmith. If your budget is limited ask the blacksmith if they can make design solutions to help you.

Be realistic about your budget – consider applying for funding if it is a project for the public's benefit.

Blacksmiths charge between £250 - £450 per day plus materials and expenses depending on their workshop overheads and style of work.

Making it happen

When you have chosen a blacksmith whose style of work suits your project and can work to your budget and lead time you will need to confirm details in writing with them. This could include the design stage, the making stage, agreed finishes, installation, budget and stage payments.

Many projects have stage payments for both private and public clients. This detail should be written into a letter of agreement which forms a simple contract between you and the blacksmith.

Commissioning a bespoke piece of ironwork is fun and should be rewarding for both parties. You might like to arrange to visit the workshop during the making of a commission. Forged ironwork has a longevity that crosses generations and is an investment for more than a lifetime.

If you are looking to have a piece of decorative ironwork made for a house, garden, public building or open space you can use the 'Find A Blacksmith' page on this website or look at other organisations that support the work of today's blacksmiths:

www.baba.org.uk

www.heritagecrafts.org.uk The Maker Directory

Appendix 1.

CHOOSING METAL FOR FORGEWORK

The commonly forged metals for decorative and artistic forge-work are: Mild Steel, Wrought Iron, Stainless Steel and Bronze.

Pure Iron, High Carbon Steel, Titanium, Brass, Copper and Aluminium can also be forged although most often as a specialist incorporated pieces.

Ensure that the metal chosen is appropriate for the design, budget, location (corrosion protection) and forging process.

MILD STEEL

By far the most common hot forged metal. It is relatively cheap, widely available, stocked in a multitude of sizes in both sheet and bar forms, easy to forge, easy to weld and has good mechanical strength when subjected to compression or ductile forces.

Mild Steel's main disadvantage is the lack of corrosion resistance and substantial efforts should be made to ensure that the bare metal is suitably protected particularly when installed in or near potentially corrosive atmospheres eg; seaside locations subjected to salt water spray.

Such protection may include galvanizing, hot zinc spraying, powder coating or painting. These finishes require regular maintenance checks to ensure their integrity.



WROUGHT IRON

Wrought iron was used until the early 1900's. Although it fell out of use after the development of affordable steel production, many examples of highly decorative examples such as gates and railings still exist around the country although many are need of restoration, preservation or repair.

Wrought Iron exhibits exceptional corrosion resistance and excellent ductility and as a result is in demand once again for both modern artist blacksmiths and those involved in the care and restoration of historic ironwork.

Although new wrought iron is no longer produced, Britain is fortunate in having the only supplier of re-cycled and re-rolled Wrought Iron in the world.

Whilst Wrought Iron has the important advantages mentioned above, it is expensive when compared to Mild Steel and lacks mechanical strength, but cost calculations need to take account of protecting Mild Steel.

Wrought Iron forging requires the smith to be skilled in the vagaries of forging at a high temperature range and the use fire welding due the metal's unique physical properties.

STAINLESS STEEL

The addition of Molybdenum and Chromium to Steel, plus other elements for specific applications, greatly increases the metal's resistance to acid attack. There are a multitude of grades and care must be taken to ensure that the one chosen is suitable for forging and readily available. Not all Stainless Steels are completely corrosion free and some may show signs of 'pitting' when exposed to some environments – e.g. stainless steel cutlery in a dishwasher pitting from contamination with mild steel.

In addition, the typical silvery lustre of Stainless Steel may not be compatible with the design or siting of the finished project. Such problems may be overcome by finishing with paint or other protective / decorative effects.

Some Stainless Steels are ideal for hot forging, but welding requires dedicated equipment and application by an experienced operator.

Where mechanical strength, low maintenance and resistance to corrosion are important Stainless Steel may be ideal but high cost may preclude their use.

BRONZE

Bronze is an alloy of Copper and Tin and is available in a vast range of types. Casting and forging the metal precedes the Iron Age, being used in Eurasia around the 3rd millennium BCE.

As with Stainless Steel careful consideration should be given to the correct Bronze for the job as there are relatively few types that are suitable for forging. Forging and welding present problems that will require the services of a blacksmith with experience in this regard.

Bronze has good mechanical strength properties, has excellent corrosion resistance and is often used for sculptural work usually because of its very attractive lustre. Another property which is of great interest in the engineering world is it that it is 'Spark Free' thereby making it suitable for use in flammable environments.

Bronze is very expensive and widely obtainable in various section sizes but limited in the lengths that are normally available from stockists.