Find out all about A SHEPHERD'S CROOK



WHAT IS A CROOK?

A sturdy walking stick which is used by shepherds to manage and catch sheep. It can be used to defend against predators or help the shepherd balance on rough terrain. A crook can even help to move tall or prickly weeds and plants when searching for lost sheep.

WHY DOES IT HAVE A HOOKED END?

The hook can catch an animal by the leg or neck – sheep and lambs can be very difficult to catch, the crook can help the shepherd take care of them.
In the days before torches, if a shepherd needed a light, the lantern could be hung on the crook leaving both hands free to deal with the sheep.

THE HISTORY OF A CROOK

The making of sticks and staffs is an ancient craft found throughout the world, although shepherds' crooks with their distinctive curved heads are believed to be unique to Britain.
Until the early-twentieth century, shepherds probably made their own crooks. Over time, competition between shepherds grew and crooks became finer, later becoming a status symbol for wealthy landowners.

WHAT'S IT MADE OF?

The main wood used for making crooks is hazel, but holly, ash, blackthorn and cherry are also used. The main horn used is sheep, but buffalo, goat and cow horns are also used. Alternatively decorative wood such as burr elm and ripple sycamore is used instead of horn.



HORN

HOW IS IT MADE?

The curve is formed by steaming the wood or immersing it in hot sand and then bending it around a brake. However, sometimes the wood is cultivated so as to grow to the desired shape, or a suitable shoot and root base can be chosen from which to carve the stick.
In the past the shepherd may have used the heat from a peat fire or that of a candle to bend the ram's horn to a rudimentary shape good enough to fulfil his needs. Today, however, the whole process of making a ram's horn crook is quite a bit different, relying on electric hot air guns and various metal jigs and bottle jacks to help form the horn into the desired shape.

MODERN CRAFT

Today, crooks are not just crafted by shepherds as a tool. They can be a highly decorated piece of art work for stickmaking shows and competitions. The Scottish Crookmakers Association has 400 members, but there will be many more, either unaffiliated or represented by the other stick dressing organisations. If you wanted to buy a shepherd's crook, prices range from £20-30 for a basic mass produced style to hundreds of pounds for handmade and artistic versions.

Sources:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shepherd%27s_crook
https://www.lowimpact.org/posts/stickmaking-rams-horn-shepherds-crook
http://heritagecrafts.org.uk/stick-dressing/



HAZEL