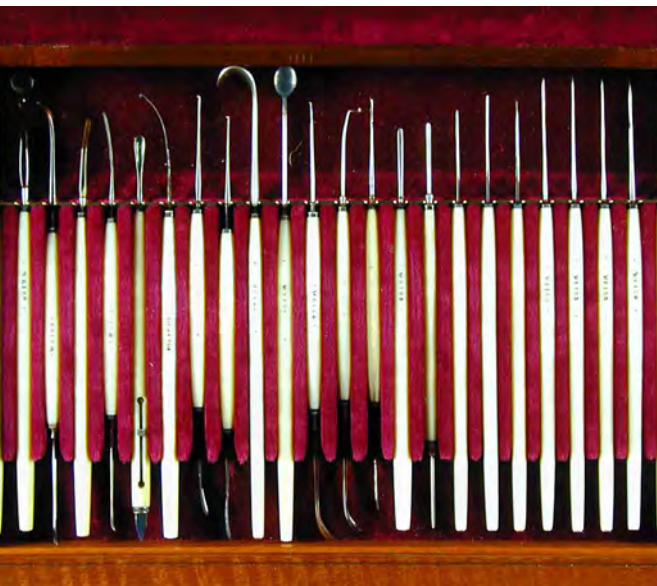


THE HISTORY OF JOHN WEISS SURGICAL INSTRUMENTS

Look closer. See further.



The Beginning

John Weiss (1773 -1843) was a highly-respected Master Cutler and surgical Instrument Maker who rose to the top of his profession, gaining a royal warrant and huge respect from the Surgeons of his time. Born in Rostock¹, Germany, the son of Georg Bernhard Jacob Weiss and Anna Elisabeth Wamkross, Johann Daniel Weiss (later known as John Weiss), moved to London and founded his company around 1787.

Originally trained as a Cutler, as was his father and great grandfather, he quickly moved into the manufacture of [surgical instruments](#). His particular talent seems to have been understanding the needs of Surgeons and transferring their ideas into practical, quality instrumentation.

¹ Mecklenburgisches Kirchenbuchamt Schwerin: St Marien Rostock 1782/617 und 1802/-, St Johannis Rostock 1803/-3/4- 20.05, St Petri Rostock taufen 1747-1774



Personal Life

John Weiss married Mary Kirby on 11th May 1805 at² St Georges Church, Hanover Square, London. They had two children, a son Frederick Foveaux baptised on 10th May 1807 and a daughter Mary baptised on 21st January 1810,³ both at St Martin in the Fields, Westminster London.

² City of Westminster Archives centre: WCA/EC 11.5.1805

³ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Hyde park Family History Centre: International genealogic Index 1993 Ed., Version 3.02 Printout 6901249



By Royal Appointment

John Weiss signed an affidavit of naturalisation to become a British Citizen on 26th June 1826, after living in England for over 31 years. He was granted denization⁴ by King George IV on 11th October 1826, similar to today's 'permanent resident status'. Later, under William IV, he was appointed 'Razor Maker to the King'. John Weiss was extremely proud of his Royal Appointment and featured the royal arms in a trademark on the pressed horn handles of his surgical instruments.

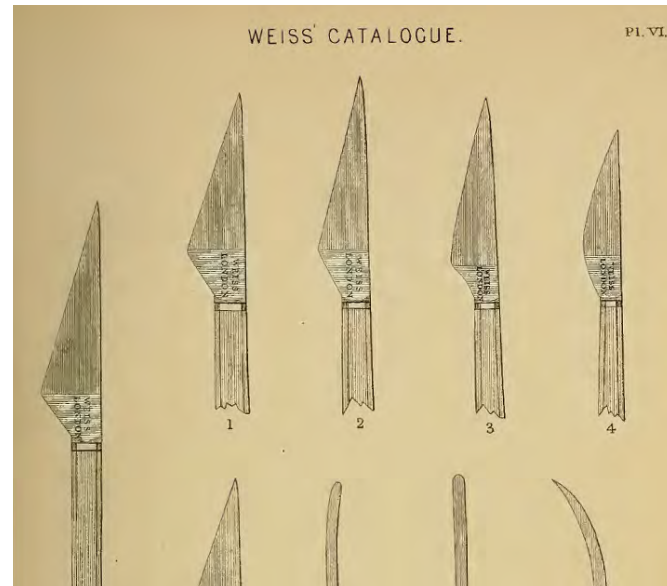
The quality and reliability of John Weiss instruments lead to them becoming the supplier of choice to the British Army. This resulted in John Weiss instruments being used around the globe, many officers carried their own personal surgical kit, some of which can be viewed in museums today.

⁴ Public Record Office Chancery Lane London: C 66/4312 Nr.15

The First Catalogue

John Weiss' first catalogue, published in 1823, included a considerable list of greatly improved and newly-invented instruments. By 1825, the catalogue was 126 pages containing detailed presentations of the Weiss instruments, experimental records and recommendations given by the leading Physicians of the day,

The catalogue also contained the Gastric Pump described as 'a patented syringe for the extracting of poisons from the stomach'. Even though extracting gastric contents employs a much easier procedure today, the Gastric Pump was widely utilised for the first half of the 19th century and is acknowledged as a major contribution to the field.



Amputation Saw

John Weiss was very skilled and highly innovative. Amongst his many creations was an amputation saw⁵. He noted that, due to tissue clogging the teeth, Surgeons often had to use several different saws when amputating a limb, prolonging the time taken and the suffering of the pre-anaesthetic patient.

His answer was to design a saw with slots between the fine teeth, which he went on to produce successfully for many years.

⁵ Bennion, E: Alt Medizinische Instrumente. Stuttgart/London: E Klett und Ph Wilson 1980

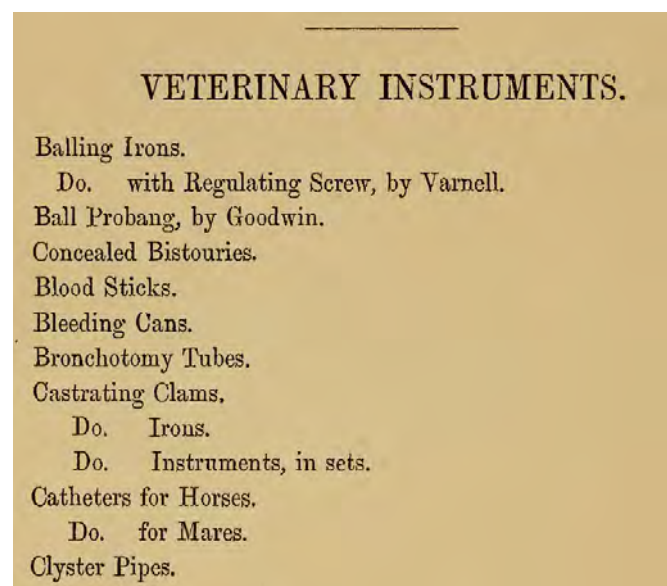


Veterinary Instruments

John Weiss became particularly interested in veterinary instruments and following the foundation of the first veterinary colleges in London 1791 and Edinburgh 1823, commenced instrument production.

A common practice at this time was bloodletting. On animals, a fleam⁶ was used, often in conjunction with a hitting stick that allowed the knife to penetrate the thick hides of some animals. John Weiss, horrified by the scarring to his own horse's neck, set about inventing an improved instrument. This resulted in the patented spring-loaded fleam, giving a measured and powerful cut and thereby dispensing with the inaccurate hitting stick.

⁶ Wright D.W: John Weiss and the Spring Fleam: Vet Hist NS 5 (1988) 83-96





John Weiss & Son

In 1831, Frederick Foveaux Weiss joined his father's firm, henceforth known as 'John Weiss & Son'⁷. He took complete control of the company upon his father's death on Christmas Day 1843. As was common amongst the Victorians, John Weiss had a fear of being buried alive and, ingenious to the end, he designed a mechanism fitted to his coffin to penetrate his heart⁷.

Held in great regard by many surgeons of the time, Sir Everard Home once described John Weiss as "Being one of the few contemporary instrument makers steady enough to stick to a task of furthering the design of new instruments rather than merely cashing in on the expanding trade of established ones".

⁷ Davis, A.B and Dreyfuss M.S: The finest Instruments Ever made: a bibliography of medical, dental, optical and pharmaceutical company trade literature, 1700-1939. Arlington: medical history Publishing Assoc., 1986

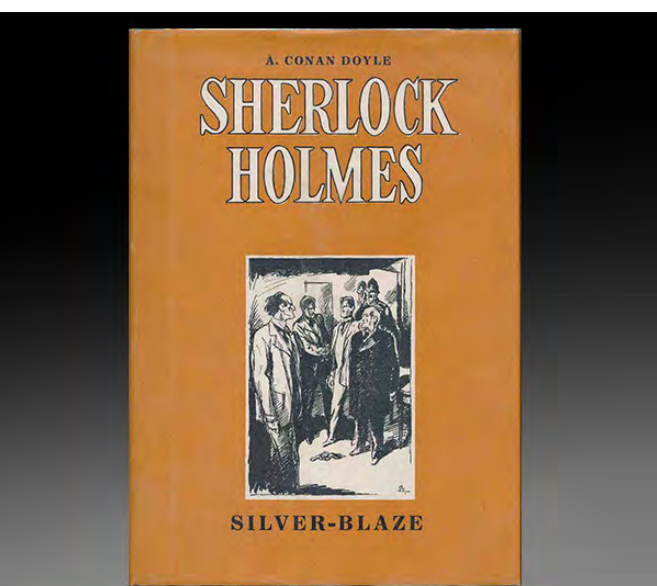


The Great Exhibition of 1851

In 1851, a special exhibition piece, referred to as the 'Blade Tree', containing 1851 blades in the shape of a cross, was created to showcase John Weiss' instruments at the Great Exhibition.

The catalogue shows that a prize medal was awarded; the classified statement of awards reads 'Weiss & son, for instruments of various kinds, exhibiting novelty, inventive and adaptive ingenuity and great perfection of mechanical execution.'⁸

⁸ Great Exhibition 1851: Reports of the Juries- Classified Statement of Awards – Prize medals. P346



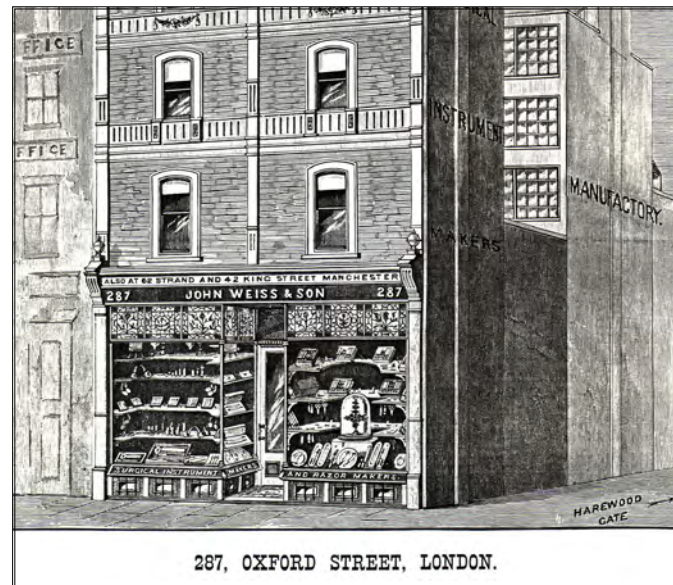
Sherlock Holmes

Such was the fame of John Weiss instruments, that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a Surgeon trained in ophthalmology, refers to them by name in the Sherlock Holmes novel 'Silver Blaze' and references an ivory handled knife with a very delicate, inflexible blade marked Weiss & Co London.

There are many anecdotal stories attached to John Weiss instruments including their use by the infamous serial killer, Jack the Ripper, and the creation of the Bowie Knife, made to the specifications of James Bowie, killed at The Alamo. Sadly, there is little proof to these stories.

Modern History

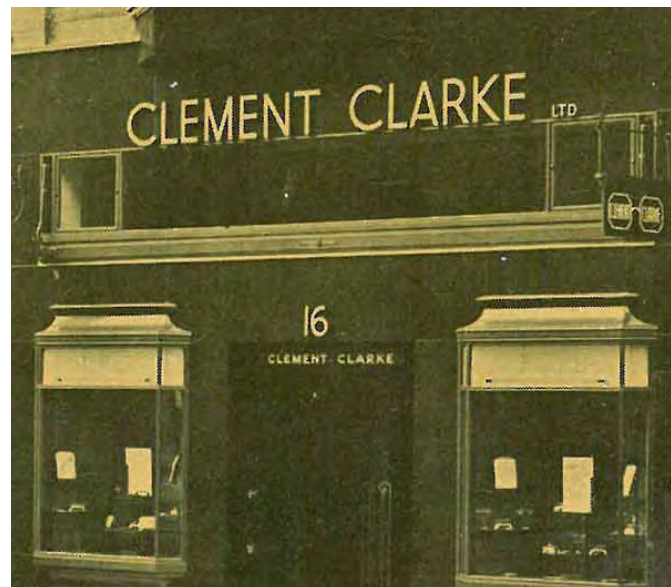
On 3rd July 1899, John Weiss became a limited company with shareholders. The introduction of the modern hospital at the end of the 19th century with the demand for sterilisable all-steel instruments, changed the face of the surgical instrument market. In many cases the manufacture of instruments by hand was replaced by industrial production methods. Numerous instrument makers ceased to exist at this time, however, John Weiss & Son prospered and expanded. It moved from its premises at 62 Strand, relocating its showroom and workshops to 287 Oxford Street (above the infamous Mappin & Webb showroom). In 1956, the showroom once again moved, this time to Wigmore Street, close to the infamous Harley Street. At the same time, the workshops moved to Bowling Green Lane in Farringdon, then again relocated to Clerkenwell, near the City of London.



Clement Clarke

John Weiss & Son Ltd has always been privately owned and during the early 20th century was part of a group that included a number of jewellery makers. The company was acquired by Clement Clarke in 1971. Clement Clarke also shared a rich history having designed the first British slit lamp in 1924, among many other innovations.

Together, the companies became part of the Haag-Streit Group in 1989, marking a massive expansion. The Haag-Streit Group now operates in more than 20 countries and employs over 1000 staff.



Haag-Streit Group

After relocating from London to the modern town of Milton Keynes, John Weiss joined its Haag-Streit Group sister companies; Clement Clarke International, Clement Clarke Holdings and Haag-Streit UK, in January 2019.

John Weiss remains an established and respected brand and the [instruments](#) are distributed by Haag-Streit UK across the world from their headquarters in Bishop's Stortford.

Haag-Streit UK is a leading supplier of a wide portfolio of other diagnostic and surgical products, including a variety of trusted surgical brands, such as MedOne, FEATHER, iTrack, Keraring, Morcher and Spiggle & Theis.



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