

Throughout history both men and women have removed unwanted body hair, and razor like objects have been found dating back to the Bronze Age. The first recorded folding 'cut throat' razor was listed in Sheffield in 1680. The type of edge that a razor was given varied and they could be quite specialised. One of the cut throat razors in the Woodhams Stone Collection is marked 'Hollow Ground' meaning that the sides of the blade are concave. These were the type of razors usually preferred by barbers. Cut throat razors required skill to use and the blade had to be extremely sharp and held at just the correct angle to the face to avoid injury.



The two razors from the Woodhams Stone Collection illustrated here were used as a pair. Later razors often came in sets of seven – one for every day of the week. Multiple razors were needed because it cut down on the wear on the blade and they needed to be kept or made sharp before use! These razors probably date from the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Razors were sharpened by using a razor strop. An abrasive was sometimes applied to the strop to help polish the blade. Different kinds of abrasives produced different finishes. The strop from the collection illustrated here was called a "Ross" Tri-Side. It has three different surfaces so that the barber could fine tune the final result. One side is covered with cork, another with plain leather and the third with ridged leather. The cork was used for blade alignment and sharpening, the leather was for finishing. The use of strops to get the right finish required great expertise.

With the invention of the safety razor in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and its successful promotion by Gillette in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the market for razor strops – and for cut throat razors - dropped drastically. Gillette produced the first razors made specifically for women in 1915, but women had used razors and tweezers for hair removal long before this.

A shaving brush was used to apply shaving soap, which was lathered up in a cup so that it could be used as lubricant for the shave. The brush was usually made of boar or badger bristles.

One of the shaving brushes in the Woodhams Stone Collection has printed on its base: '*British Made/ Pure Bristle/ Guaranteed Free From Anthrax*'. This was important because there were cases of anthrax during and after the First World War which were discovered to be linked to shaving brushes. Anthrax is a terrible disease caused by the bacterium [\*Bacillus anthracis\*](#) which usually results in death. These brushes turned out not to have been made of bristle at all but of unwashed horsehair which was much cheaper. One case reported in 1923 in America was traced to an 'anthrax free' shaving brush which was marked of British manufacture and guaranteed free from anthrax – in fact it might have looked rather like this one!