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The first machines still needed a scythe

A typographic fact sheet. No photographs.

Scythes were used to cut crops or grass at harvest. They replaced sickles and bagging hooks, which required the user to bend down low. Later they were themselves largely replaced — but they did not vanish on the day the first mower arrived.

Opening the field

The Museum of English Rural Life says the scythe stayed in use "because the first machines, still needed the field to be opened up by clearing an area to give the mechanical mower room to start." It was also useful in awkward corners a machine could not reach. An experienced reaper "could reap up to 2 acres of wheat in a day," and carried a whetstone because the blade had to be kept very sharp.

Probably a farrier's rasp

The Museum's own scythe, object 96/88, dates from around 1900. It was given by Mrs Monger, from tools that had belonged to her father, George Ernest Brown, and her grandfather, Charles Lesley Brown, a well-known family of shopkeepers in Bramley, Hampshire, recorded in the 1911 census as grocer and farmer. "This scythe was probably made by the village blacksmith Alfred Willis." He had a reputation for turning old farrier's rasps into edged tools, and was described as the last manufacturer of hand-forged agricultural edge tools in central Southern England. The official word is probably, and this sheet keeps it.

Source, checked 17 November 2026: The MERL, Scythe, object 96/88, written by MERL volunteer John. This is not a MERL publication. haymaking.farmyard.im is part of the ReallyByte network, run by REALLYBYTE, based in the Isle of Man. ReallyByte — Fun. Educational. Useless.