

Ironart's "Rough Guide to getting into metalworking"

The team at Ironart have this to say about their work:

"Architectural metalworking won't make you rich but can be very rewarding".

"Having the ability to create something beautiful or functional from a raw material is fulfilling. There's something deeply satisfying about working with all the elements: ore, water, air and fire".

"No two projects are ever quite the same, nor are two days the same."

"It stretches you creatively and mentally - combining aesthetics with mathematics."

"It's not for the faint-hearted. It is hard work, it is dirty and dusty, you'll burn and cut yourself, you'll get repetitive strain injuries and things stuck in your eyes, you often work outside, it's cold and wet!"

"It can be really sociable, you meet interesting people and liaise with customers"

"There is a well-established social side of the craft community all around the globe which you can tap into if you immerse yourself fully in metalworking events such as craft shows and forge-ins. "

AS A STARTING POINT: If this hasn't put you off and you think you might be interested, get yourself booked into an Ironart taster workshop and give it a try. Lots of other blacksmiths run one day courses – to find one, do an online search, or look on the British Artist Blacksmith Association (BABA) website.

IF YOU WANT TO TAKE IT FURTHER THERE ARE A NUMBER OF ROUTES YOU CAN FOLLOW:

1) Formal qualifications: For more information go to: www.baba.org.uk/Training

Everything from a Foundation Course, a BTEch national diploma to a Bachelor of Arts Degree

- National School of Blacksmithing, Hereford – offer a range of courses (part time and full time, evening classes) courses are aimed at people who are interested in doing traditional forging and techniques associated with that. As part of degree course you spend time in the forge at the college.

Others include: The Blacksmith's Guild, Exeter. Plumpton College, East Sussex. West Dean College, West Sussex. Chichester College, East Sussex. Myerscough College, Lancashire.

Alternatively, many UK universities offer Engineering or Design Degree courses which include metalworking as part of the syllabus.

2) Apprenticeships:

Look out for adverts on the "Government Apprenticeship Vacancy Matching Service" – online.

Pick up the phone and cold-call blacksmiths – start with the BABA website to find blacksmiths in your area

3) DIY Forging

There is nothing to stop you setting up your own forge and experimenting at home – go online and look for forge plans. You can buy 2nd hand forges on ebay. The Wessex Guild have plans for bottom blast forges you can make yourself. Be very careful and wear all the correct protective equipment.

Useful websites:

BABA (British Artist Blacksmith Association) – www.baba.org.uk

National Heritage Ironwork Group (NHIG) - www.nhig.org.uk

National School of Blacksmithing, Hereford - www.hct.ac.uk

The Blacksmith's Guild, Exeter - www.blacksmithsguild.com