

## “IS IT REAL OR NOT?”

By Bob Garay

Recently I found a unique brace on Jim Bodes website [www.bodetools.com](http://www.bodetools.com). Now I have over 200 braces of all types and sizes but have been looking for one like this for a while. It is like most other braces but it has a very long lower shaft going

said his wife would look it over. My wife wouldn't know the difference between a Stanley odd job and a cooper's traveler. She calls the traveler a “pizza cutter”. This got me to thinking what would be the “evidence” that would lead a person to determine if



Three long shaft braces. The top is 100% authentic while the middle one is an antique craftsman made Sheffield style with a reworked neck and head. The bottom is a modern reproduction.

to the chuck. Now it isn't that I haven't come across one before, because I have. A year ago I came across one browsing a tool auction's electronic bidding site. I threw in a bid hoping to beat the floor bidders. Well I did, but when it got to my house it was evident that it was not an authentic antique brace, but a poorly made replica. Again recently, while in Nashua for the Donnelly Auction, I was cruising the parking lot sales and saw a brace on a dealer's table of the same design. It was like a plated Sheffield brace but it also had a long lower end. I talked to the dealer and he said it was authentic, as two others had come up in English auctions. His price reflected its rarity and I had to pass it by. Thus when I saw the brace on Jim's website, with a reasonable price, I was skeptical. I called him up to verify its age but Jim was away on a tool trip and could not immediately look it over. He said he would have his wife Trish look it over, as she has handled many tools working with Jim in the tool business. He did inform me that it was a Dutch brace coming from a reputable dealer. I said great, but when I hung up I was still skeptical. I mean Jim

an antique brace really was authentic. When I got the newly acquired brace from Bode Tools I was happy to find that it was indeed an original antique. At the same time I wondered if the dealer in Nashua might accept a lower offer if it was reasonable. I



Even though the bottom brace has a stylish carved 1804 date, it is far from 200 years old. Notice the hand rubbed wood on the center grip of the top brace.



The lower authentic brace shows wear and well worn iron ferrules. The chip in the head has worn smooth over the years. Iron nails thru the upper web extension hold the head. The shiny brass in the top reproduction is a dead giveaway to newness.

called him and we struck a deal. I was excited with anticipation to receive it and examine its details. After studying it, I concluded that it was actually a brace that fit in between the two others I had. An antique brace body made by a craftsman to look like an English Sheffield plated brace with a reworked head. Thus, I thought it interesting to show with some photos what allows a collector to determine authenticity to a certain degree.

#### The Patina & Wood

When one looks at the three braces you can see a dark patina on the Dutch and English braces but none on the 1804 brace. Also there is lighter coloring to the patina where the hand would have naturally rubbed in the center grip of these two. The Dutch brace has actually developed a polished effect at the center grip from the continued rubbing of the hand and its natural oils. The wood of the English brace is ash and the Dutch brace is elm. The reproduction is



The authentic brace head to the right shows 150+ years of ageing where the repro head on the left shows none.

mahogany which is almost never used in wooden brace bodies.

#### The Head & Neck



The English brace on the right lacks the brass bottom plate and washer under the neck that a typical Sheffield brace on the left has.

The neck and body of the repro is separated by a thick brass disk which is shiny and lacking age scuffing. The head is tight with not a bit of wear. Not only that, but the head is drilled off a little bit from center and wobbles. This would never be the case in a real brace that has to be used every day. The Dutch brace has an iron ferrule which is correct for early wood braces. Also, the spinning of the head has worn the neck down a bit to actually cause a loose head. This would be expected of a well used brace. The real brace head also has some minor worm holes and a small chip. The top has a rubbed wear to its edges where the reproduction is crisp. Now the English brace is a dilemma to figure out. It has what looks like a newly turned ebony head. My first thought is that the ebony looks out of place for this brace. The brace body is of rough construction and the ebony head is a very fine turning of rare wood. After taking it apart I found that it was held on with two galvanized modern nuts and a galvanized washer. Also,

when comparing it to all my other Sheffield braces, the neck lacks a washer and brass plate at its base. The craftsman making the brace obviously omitted this important fac-

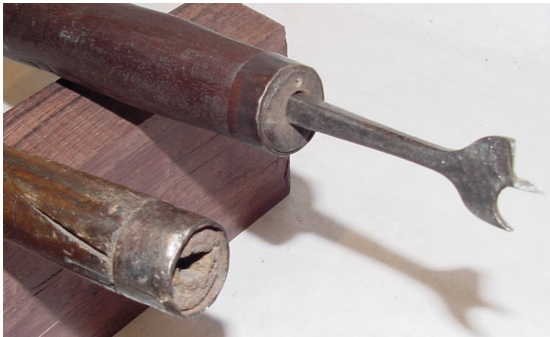


English brace head disassembled. It is held on with modern galvanized nuts and washer.

tory characteristic that prevents wear and then looseness. It is likely that the head has been replaced during more recent times and not original.

#### The Chuck

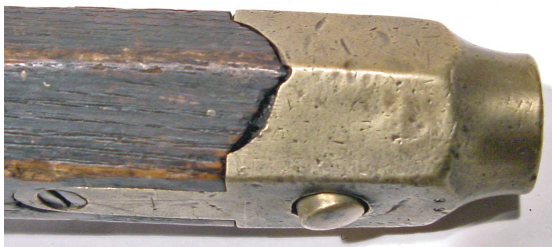
The chuck ends on both the reproduction and Dutch braces have iron ferrules, but the reproduction has a forged iron ring with crisp edges without any smooth wear. The Dutch ferrule has a worn shine to it. When you look at the hole for the tapered bit to fit into the reproduction's chuck, it is a round hole. Not a shaped carved hole, tapered to



The Dutch brace on right shows much evidence of ageing. The repro on right has a round hole to hold a tapered square bit.

fit such a bit. The authentic brace has a slotted hole for flat shanked Dutch bits. Also, the wood around the chuck of the Dutch brace shows much evidence of checking and splintering that drilling forces over the years might have caused. The English brace has a button Sheffield type chuck. The chuck as well as the brass plates are poorly fitted, something not seen on braces made by actual Sheffield manufactures. Thus, this brace is probably made by a working craftsman during the 1800's using parts from a real Sheffield brace.

Sometimes a collector like myself wants to



The English brace has a chuck and wood body that shows much age. Yet the fitting of the chuck and brass is not up to the quality standards of normal Sheffield braces.

find a real treasure so bad that he loses all sensibility and tricks himself into believing something is right. If we stand back and let common sense take over, the truth will be told. I have even imagined names in places where the mark should be, as I erroneously connect the grain lines into a rare mark. One way to become more of an expert on authentic tools is to handle as many as possible and study their characteristics. That is the advantage of going to tool auctions. Even if I cannot afford the high end tools, at least I can handle them and study their characteristics. Who knows, maybe someday I will find a real diamond in the rough.