

Hooks from Sewing Needles?

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“Modern” fishing hooks were originally made from sewing needles. The center for making sewing needles from the early 1600's until the mid-1950's was near the town of Redditch, England, which is close to Stratford-upon-Avon (home of Shakespeare,) and a bit south of Manchester, in west-central England.

A bit of history -- the area was originally the home of Bordelsey Abbey built by Cistercian monks from France in the 12th century. The area was a virtual swamp, so the monks drained off the water by cutting channels that formed streams, one of which carried red clay, and was named “The Red Ditch”; thus the name Redditch. By 1538 Henry VIII had become a bit disgruntled the Catholic church due to the fact that they would not recognize divorce as he wished, so he disbanded the monks and destroyed the abbey.

Prior to the 16th Century, needle making was done usually by blacksmiths rather tediously. The source at this time for high quality needles was Europe, but due to political unrest, some of the European needle makers migrated to England. Eventually they found their way to the area around Redditch. The process for manufacture on a large scale required water, and The Red Ditch supplied that. The first recorded needle manufacturer was established in 1639. The trade spread about the area, and became firmly established in Redditch in the early 1700's. The business boomed to the point that in 1866 as many as 100,000,000 needles were made per week. It was now the world's center for needle manufacture. In short order it became the center for hook manufacture as well.

Besides needles, fishing hooks were made by several manufacturers. They are still made in Redditch applying many of the old methods used 100 or more years ago. Partridge Hooks of Redditch, though now owned by Mustad of Norway, until recently used much of the same equipment of that past era. Needles continued to be manufactured in the mill at Bordelsey Abbey up until 1958 in the same way they were in 1730 when that mill was first built.

To this day, odds are if you have a packet of needles at home the label on the package will likely read, "made in Redditch, England."