

## Chapter 3

# The Ustonson Dynasty

## 1760s-1855

### ONESIMUS USTONSON 1761-91

Onesimus Ustonson, together with successive members of his family traded for almost a century and were the most important of all tackle makers. In addition to being the most prestigious of the pioneers in the eyes of the nobility, the business went on to become Royal Warrant Holder and supplied fishing tackle to three successive British Monarchs. The founder, Onesimus, was the first maker to advertise a multiplying winch and therefore has always been credited with being the inventor. A sensational discovery has provided new evidence, which was not available when the first edition of my book *Fishing Tackle: A Collector's Guide* published in 1989, recorded the history of the Ustonsons, and in my estimation it confirms the maker was indeed the very first to design and introduce a winch with the multiplying mechanism.

The Ustonson story began with the founder, a man with the unusual name of Onesimus Ustonson. He purchased an old established tackle business the 'Fish and Crown', 48, Bell Yard, Temple Bar, London which had enjoyed continuous trading that dated back to 1700, with proprietors Robert Hopkins (1700-30) and John Herro (1730-60). The early records suggest he started trading in 1761 as the previous year was the last John Herro appeared on any trade list. By 1763 Ustonson had become well established since an old trade document found in the Guild Hall, London confirmed him as one of six major exporters of fishing tackle.

The long established 'Fish and Crown', a well-known haunt of anglers was sited at the bottom end of Bell Yard, a busy, grimy, overcrowded area of 48 houses and shops extending to an area of 165 yards. The shop was on a corner next

door to 205, Fleet Street, a position close to the hustle and bustle of the dusty main thoroughfare along which the horse-drawn carriages passed. Nearby was a large stone gateway designed by Sir Christopher Wren called Temple Bar, which was not a City gate but a symbolic boundary between City and Court. When the Sovereign wished to pass through, a ceremony was performed in which the doors were closed and opened again to the sound of a trumpet, followed by the Lord Mayor presenting a sword to the Monarch who returned it before Royalty were free to pass. The top of Temple Bar was at times used to display rotting heads of executed prisoners and the gruesome spectacle survived until the last head fell from its pike during a storm in 1772. That was the background to the busy, dirty, Dickensian type market place where Ustonson sold fishing tackle in the metropolis. It was an area of mainly working class people and traders through which passed the rich merchants and gentry.

The earliest advertisement that records the activities of Onesimus Ustonson was a trade card distributed c1768, informing all lovers of angling that he was successor to John Herro at the 'Fish and Crown'. It gave a full list of all the tackle he sold, which included artificial flies, fish and all manner of baits also 'the best sort of multiplying brass winches both stop and plain'. This trade card is part of a collection of early documents produced by the pioneer London tackle makers and is housed in the British Museum. It is of great significance since it pre-dates a similar announcement placed in the *Art of Angling* in 1770, which previously had been considered the earliest record of the mechanism in the workings of a fishing reel.

In 1775 he was distributing a slightly different trade card, which omitted to mention being successor to John Herro

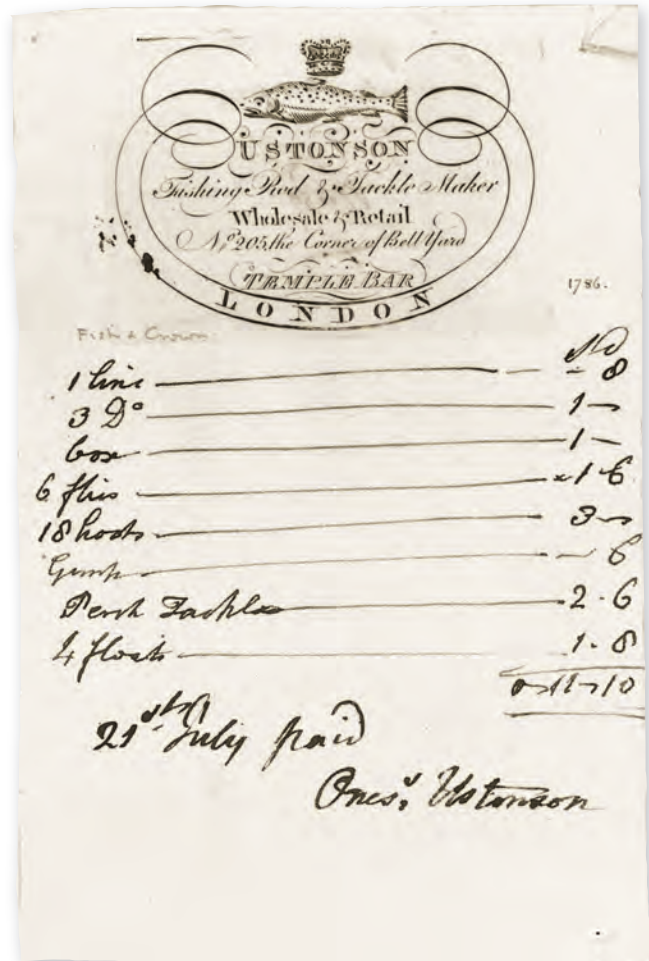
and was confidently trading under his own name from a new address at 205, Fleet Street. The new premises were only next door to the 48, Bell Yard shop, but the move gave him a more impressive main road frontage address from where he could attract the wealthier anglers of the day. Ustonson offered the finest quality rods and reels and stamped them with lavish script engraving, thus applying the same principle and marketing technique of the designer labels of today. The gentry would have taken great pride to enhance their status by using an Ustonson brass winch, inscribed with the prestigious maker's logo and even more so if fitted to the matching, upmarket rod. He cleverly maintained the image of providing individual quality and exclusivity, for which no doubt he charged a premium and at the same time probably supplied some unmarked reels to the lower end of the market. The small number of invoices that have survived clearly show the strategy proved successful. One of the most interesting is dated March 11th 1772 for goods supplied to the pioneer botanist Sir Joseph Banks who was Captain Cook's companion on his voyages of discovery. The items were for the second voyage on Resolution. The Royal Society had commissioned Cook to search for the mythical *Terra Australis*. His achievements were – first to cross the Antarctic Line, first to circumnavigate the world in a westerly direction and first to circumnavigate the world in both directions. The goods supplied for the voyage included – two trunks – 4' each, a target board, one dozen darts, one pair of pellet moulds, two bags of pellets, four spears sockets, four darts and three dozen Mother-of-Pearl hooks. Total price £8 15s 2d.

Unusual are the Mother-of-Pearl hooks purchased for the voyage and 'two trunks' together with accessories.

The trade cards of the 18th century usually offered trunks amongst the list of tackle. These were long bamboo or copper tubes 3-6' long and ¾" diameter, through which pellets or darts were fired from the mouth. The game using trunks and a board was the forerunner of the modern game of darts. Apparently trunks were widely used in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. The earliest documentary evidence of their use in Europe was about 1425 in Italy. A priest from Fiesole published a book of funny stories, one of which described a King sitting in the window of his room and blowing small pellets in the direction of one of his cooks. The first illustration of one appeared in the second half of the 16th century in France in manuscripts of Pietro de Crescenzi's *Treastise of Rural Economy*. It showed a figure with a 5-6' tube held to his mouth and aiming into the trees to kill birds. The first edition *Johnson's Dictionary* (1775-76) was the earliest in Britain to list trunks, describing them as long tubes through which pellets of clay were blown. A most informative advertisement appeared in a copy of *Land and Water* by a man named Lang of 22,



The earliest known trade card of Ustonson distributed in the late 1760s by Onesimus Ustonson.



An invoice bearing the signature of Onesimus Ustonson. (British Museum)




Cockspur Street, London who offered – ‘The walking stick blow-tube... A very powerful and accurate weapon for destroying vermin, shooting birds etc. when reduced in size, forms with a target, one of the best indoor amusements for ladies and gentlemen’. The walking stick blow-tube looked like an ordinary walking cane but through the centre ran a brass tube of about ¾" diameter. There was usually a handle to the stick that could be removed ready for use and similarly a removable ferrule at the other end. The pellet moulds advertised were scissor-moulds similar to the ones for casting lead bullets except there was no pouring hole. Darts were like darning needles with paper cones attached to the rear end to provide a tight

To all Lovers of Angling,

# Onesimus Ustonson,

SUCCESSOR TO THE LATE  
Mr. JOHN HERRO,

AT THE



No. 48, the Bottom of Bell-Yard, near Temple-Bar,  
LONDON,

**M**AKES all Sorts of Fishing Rods, and all Manner of the best Fishing Tackle, Wholesale and Retail, at the lowest Rates; sells the right **KIRBY'S HOOKS**, being the best tempered of any make, which cannot be had at any other Shop; the best Sort of Artificial Flies, Menow Tackle, Jack and Perch, and Artificial Menow; and all Sorts of Artificial Baits, &c. made upon the said Hooks, in the neatest Manner, for Pike, Salmon and Trout; Spring Snap-Hooks; Live and Dead Snap, and Live Bait Hooks, Trowing Hooks of various Sorts; the best Sort of Treble and Double Box, and Single Swivels; Gimp, both Silver and Gold; the best and freshest *India Weed* or *Graft*, just come over; likewise a fresh Parcel of superfine Silk Worm Gut, no better ever seen in *England*, as fine as a Hair, and as strong as Six, the only Thing for Trout, Carp and Salmon; the best Sort of Multiplying Brafs Winches, both stop and plain; Weved Hair and Silk Lines, and all other Sorts of Lines for Angling; various Sorts of Reels and Cates; and all Sorts of Pocket Books for Tackle, Menow Kettles, and Nets to preserve Live Bait; Fishing Paniers and Bags; Variety of Gentle Bines and Worm Bags; Landing Nets and Hooks; Fishing Stools; Wicker and Leather Bottles; and many other Curiosities in the Way of Angling. All Sorts of Trunks to shoot Darts and Pellets.

Trade card with hand written invoice on the back supplied to Sir Joseph Banks. (State Library New South Wales)

119  
London <sup>the</sup> 11. Mar. 1772

Josh Banks Esq: Bot of Onef: Ustonson

2 Trunks 4 feet Each	0.8.0
1 Target Boards	0.3.6
1 Do: Darts	0.4.0
1 pair Pellet moulds	0.1.6
2 Bags of Pellets	0.2.2
4 Spears w <sup>th</sup> sockets & darts each	0.5.0
3 Do: & 11 Method of Beart hooks	7.1.0
	£ 8.15.2

Redif 10. April 1772  
the Contents in full of all Demands  
J. Onef: Ustonson

Ustonson's hand written invoice. (State Library New South Wales)

fit in the tube. These tubes must have been in regular use and reached their peak between 1760 and 1780. John Herro was advertising them and Ustonson, who succeeded him at 48, Bell Yard, continued to put them on his broadsheets. Other makers trading in them included George Hutchinson, Bartho Lowe and Mary Knight; all were in business during that period.

A new patron of Ustonson was The Right Honourable The Earl of Winterton. He was a very keen fisherman and had been buying tackle from Bartholomew Lowe at the Golden Fish, Drury Lane and on June 10th 1775 he visited the maker's new shop and purchased tackle amounting to £2 3s 2d. The detailed invoice was handwritten on the back of the trade card which carried the signature of Ustonson for the account settled on June 19th 1775. The total finally paid was £3 8s 0d and included an additional purchase.




	£	s	d
6 cork trimmers – fixed complete	0	9	0
1 silk snap line – fixed complete	0	2	3
2 dead snap hooks and swivels	0	1	6
1 brass winch and strong silk line	0	7	6
2 trawing hooks, 2 needles	0	1	6
1 flat reel, 6 lines fixed, and pocket books	0	12	0
3 hair lines, 6 hooks	0	2	0
1 landing net fixed	0	5	0
1 large packing case	0	2	3
Paid for booking	0	0	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£2</b>	<b>3s</b>	<b>2d</b>

The firm continued to trade in the founder's name from the same Fleet Street address on the corner of Bell Yard but by 1783 a son was working in the business. Proof of this comes from a Ustonson bill to Mr Mann which was dated March 1st 1783. It shows the signature of a Thomas Onesimus Ustonson, accompanied by the words 'Rec'd The Contents in full for my Father'. This signature can be compared and shown to be a different one to that of his father, which appeared on an invoice dated 1786.

*June 7 1779*  
*Onesimus Ustonson*  
*for the Honourable*  
*to the Earl of Winterton*  
 To all Lovers of Angling.

**Onesimus Ustonson,**  
 The Original Fishing Rod and Tackle M A K E R,



Removed from No. 48, Bell-Yard, to hext Houfe, No. 205, the  
 Corner of Bell-Yard, near Temple-Bar, Fleet-Street, LONDON,

**M**AKES all Sorts of Fishing Rods, and all Manner of the beft Fishing Tackle. Wholesale and Retail, at the lowest Rates; fells the right CHARLES KIRBY'S HOOKS, being the beft tempered of any made, which cannot be had at any other Shop; the beft Sort of Artificial Flies, Minnow Tackle, Jack and Perch, and Artificial Menows; and all Sorts of Artificial Baits, &c. made upon the said Hooks, in the neateft Manner, for Pike, Salmon and Trout; Spring Snap-Hooks; Live and Dead Snap, and Live Bait Hooks, Trowling Hocks of various Sorts; the beft Sort of Treble and Double Box, and Single Swivels; Gimp, both Silver and Gold; the beft and frefthest *India Weed* or *Grafs*, juft come over; likewise a freth Parcel of superfine Silk Worm Gut, no better ever feen in *England*, as fine as a Hair, and as ftong as Six, the only Thing for Trout, Carp and Salmon; the beft Sort of Multiplying Brafs Winches, both ftop and plain; Wove Hair and Silk Lines; curious braided or platted Silk Lines that will not tangle or curl when ufed; and all other Sorts of Lines for Angling; various Sorts of Reels and Cafes; and all Sorts of Pocket Books for Tackle, Minnow Kettles, and Nets to preferve Live Bait; Fishing Paniers and Bags; Landing Nets and Hooks; Fishing Stools; neat Leather Bottles; and many other Curiofities in the Way of Angling. All Sorts of Trunks to fhoot Darts and Pellets.

\* \* \* All Orders executed in the moft expeditious Manner.

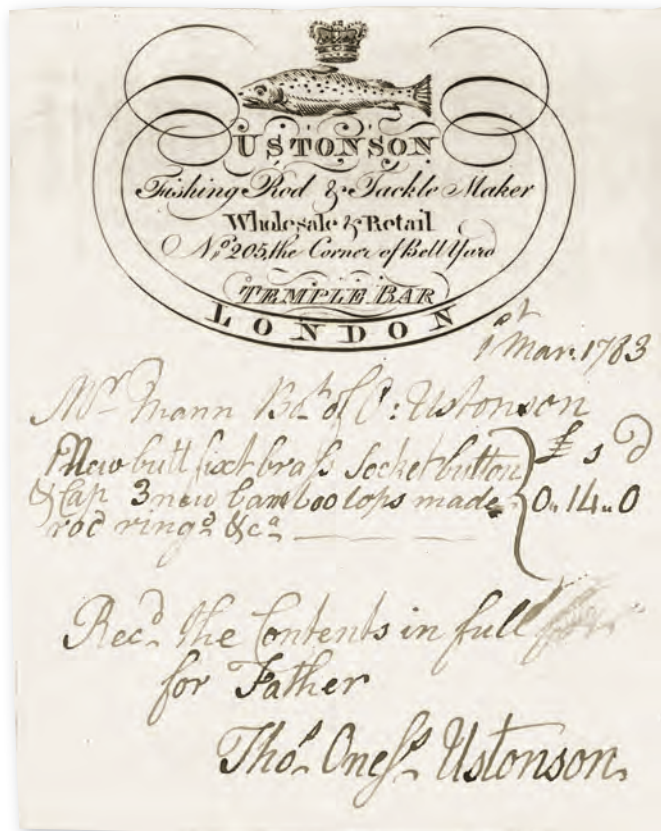
A trade card on the rear of which was detailed the invoice for the Right Honourable the Earl of Winterton.



A trunk concealed inside a walking stick with detachable handle and ivory mouthpiece.



Another customer was Lord Delaval, who on June 18th 1789 purchased a quantity of tackle including three rods for £2 and two winches for 10 shillings plus additional items that made it up to the sum of six guineas.



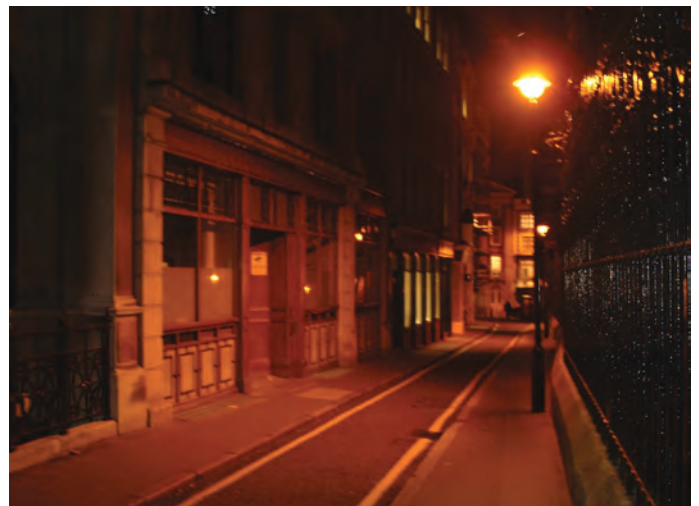
Invoice signed 'Thos Ones Ustonson for father'.

Onesimus Ustonson, the eminent tackle maker, was a member of the Guild of Turners and in 1783 became the Worshipful Master. The Guild became the Company it is today with the title 'The Masters, Wardens and Commonalty of the Mystery or Art of the Turners of London'. The Charter dated June 12th 1602 was granted by King James I of England and XI of Scotland. For centuries the Turners Guild controlled the trade in the City and had the right to search for and destroy any article that did not carry a mark to show a member had made it.

In 1796 Onesimus Ustonson was called for Jury Service at the Old Bailey for the case of Robert Thomas Crossfield accused of the crime of Treason by way of offences against the King. Two hundred people were called for duty and all were excused except the chosen 13 for a variety of reasons, some of which included – not a Freeholder – fined – excused on account of age – abroad – excused on account of deafness – ill. William Axford appeared to be the most unfortunate since he was found unsuitable on account he

was dead. Ustonson was not required and no reason given which suggests he was supplying fishing tackle to King George III in the 1790s which would have created a conflict of interest.

While Ustonson was trading at 205, Fleet Street adjoining 48, Bell Yard, the area gained notoriety for the darkest and most gruesome crime in Britain's history. A lady by the name of Margery Lovett had a shop further along the alleyway at 7, Bell Yard. It became famed for its tasty meat pies and attracted all class of customers. What they did not know was the ingredients included human flesh from victims of her lover Sweeney Todd, the demon barber. The murderous acts took place at the barber's shop 186, Fleet Street and as many as 160 men met their death. Sweeney Todd and his lady friend had discovered a tunnel below the Church, which led from below the barber's shop and ended up at a false wall in the basement of the pie shop in Bell Yard. That was the means by which the meat was delivered, but Sweeney Todd's eventual downfall was the result of depositing the remains of the corpses in the crypt below St. Dunstan's Church. The stench from below the sacred building attracted the attention of the Bow Street Runners. Mrs Lovett was arrested and confessed but poisoned herself while awaiting trial, and Sweeney Todd was hanged in public in 1802. The crime took place over a number of years and all the time Onesimus Ustonson and his son Thomas were trading close to both the bakery and the barber's shop.



Site of Margery Lovett's shop in Bell Yard. ([Knowledgeoflondon.com](http://Knowledgeoflondon.com))

There have been three Ustonson multiplying winches sold in recent years and each, according to the catalogue, was inscribed simply – 'Ustonson Maker' (singular), making it almost certain they were produced at the early period when Onesimus was sole proprietor; particularly since each had feet pierced with rows of tiny holes to take a leather pad,

which was the earliest method of attaching an Ustonson winch to a rod. These three early multipliers, like all the maker's subsequent models, were regular shaped winches with the multiplying gear mechanism housed within a circular casing; that was the design of every known plain or multiplying British winch of the 18th and 19th centuries.

In January 1985 Sotheby's held a specialist fishing tackle auction in London and in addition to an Ustonson plain winch with the full maker's inscription, there was listed an unmarked multiplying winch with pad perforations to the foot. The unusual and interesting feature was a letter 'U' set in the bridge supporting the foot. Naturally one wondered whether it indicated the winch had been made by Ustonson, but at the time it seemed it would never be possible to prove it was the maker's mark. However, two years later research led me to three Ustonson winches owned by three collectors in America. One was also a multiplier discovered near the Kentucky River with the inscription – 'Ustonson Maker to his Majesty Temple Bar London' and it was stamped with the letter 'U' on the bridge supporting the foot. The owner Frank Stewart kindly agreed to my request and provided an impression of the 'U' by way of a paper rubbing and it proved to be an exact match to the one on the winch sold by Sotheby's.

On July 7th 2007 an Ustonson multiplying winch was sold at David Duggleby Auctions, Scarborough. Although the auction house had never specialised in the sale of collectable fishing tackle, their listing on the Internet attracted telephone buyers from across the country. Any winch inscribed with the name Ustonson would be something very special but this one turned out to be in a class of its own. Nothing like it by Ustonson or any early maker from the 18th or 19th centuries has ever been found. I consider it to be the ultimate discovery –

#### USTONSON'S ORIGINAL MULTIPLYING WINCH

It is believed to have been the property of a titled person who was a landowner in Yorkshire. Ownership was eventually transferred to his gamekeeper and came down through his beneficiary and successive family members over an incredible two and a half centuries. The exceptional fine condition suggested it had seen very little use on a riverbank but instead been preserved as a treasured family possession.

The very first reel to introduce the multiplying mechanism has created worldwide debate among tackle collectors and the fishing fraternity, since an advertisement for one was discovered in an Ustonson trade notice in *The True Art of Angling* published in 1770. Onesimus may have considered the new innovation simply no more than an additional variation to his range of winches, which at the time



Multiplying brass winch with curved crank and turned ivory handle, foot perforated to fit a leather pad. There is no inscription but the bridge supporting the foot carries the 'U' trademark.



'U' trademark set in the bridge supporting the foot of the Ustonson multiplying winch.



Ustonson multiplying winch 2 1/4" diameter with script engraving – 'Ustonson Maker to his Majesty, Temple Bar, London' also the pillar supporting the foot carries the 'U' trademark. (Frank Stewart)



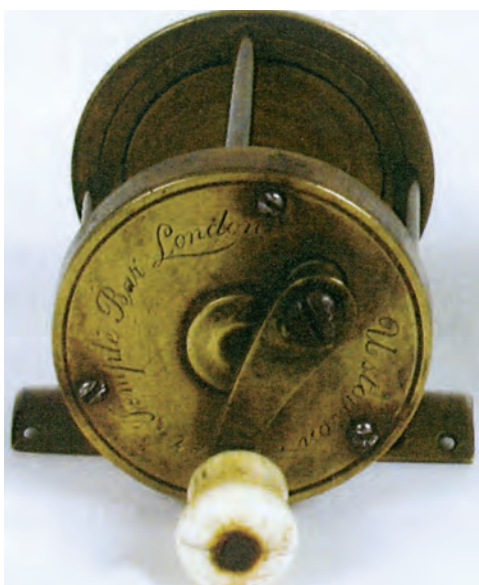
included plain – multiplying – rim-stop, not realising the importance or the impact it would have on future generations. There was no effective Patent protection in the 18th century and virtually every London tackle maker added a multiplier to his or her list of tackle from the 1770s. Most produced a simpler, cheaper version with only two gear wheels, a large one attached to the crank handle which engaged with a small one that turned the drum an increased number of revolutions.

The Ustonson multiplying winch is unique, being the only reel model that is of supreme importance to collectors on



Ustonson multiplying brass winch 2¼" diameter, ivory handle on curved crank, faceplate engraved – 'Ustonson Maker, Temple Bar, London'. Multiplying mechanism in standard circular casing. (Angling Auctions)

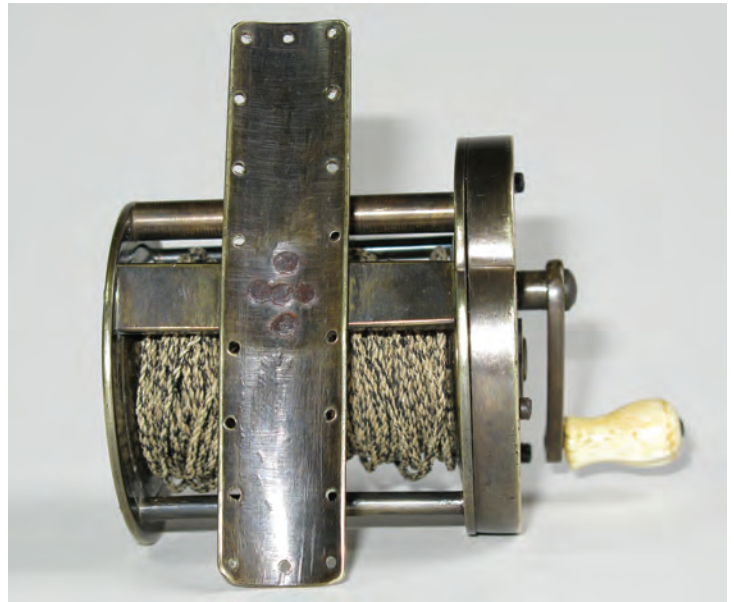
Ustonson multiplying winch 1¾" diameter ivory handle on curved crank, foot pierced with 12 holes to take leather pad, faceplate engraved – 'Ustonson Maker, Temple Bar, London'. Multiplier from the maker's earliest period with mechanism inside a standard circular casing. (Angling Auctions)



Early multiplying mechanism with the simpler two wheel gearing made by one of Ustonson's contemporaries.

both sides of the Atlantic. American fishermen were using the maker's multipliers for more than half a century before Snyder made the first home grown product in around 1820 and that first model was based on the British maker's design. Ustonson's Original Multiplying Winch represents the very beginning of the long history of bass fishing and bait-casters, the finest of which have always been made in the USA. American historians long ago conceded Dr Henshall was wrong in claiming Snyder to be the inventor of the multiplying mechanism for fishing reels and that the early examples had indeed come from Britain. However, they then adopted the idea all early imports were of a rough, crude design and little more than winders to store the line and that it was the pioneer Snyder, a watch maker, who introduced precision engineering and made the first smooth running reel. The newly discovered multiplying winch proves the long held supposition completely wrong. The design of the gear wheels is remarkably efficient, since the multiplying mechanism and reversible check work in tandem and the winding action is extremely smooth and precise. Ustonson's combination of brass to steel gears was the basis of the Kentucky makers' smooth running multipliers, while Charles Farlow was using the same mechanism design 100 years later. It is now clear 'precision engineering' was not introduced to fishing reels by Snyder or any Kentucky jeweller. They simply had the skill to extend their activities and replicate reels, which had been made in London for three quarters of a century.

The striking difference which separates the newly discovered multiplying winch from that of every other that has ever been found, is the distinctive shape created by incorporating a crescent-shaped extension on to the side of the one piece casing, in order to create additional space for the new gearwheels. Apart from the design problems, it would have been far more expensive to make than the casing for a standard circular winch, but when the idea of gearing was first conceived, Ustonson must have thought the extra space essential to accommodate the new multiplying mechanism. However, all multiplying winches by the maker from its very inception and throughout the 18th and 19th centuries were designed with the gear wheels inside a standard circular casing. Therefore the newly discovered variant winch, with the costly crescent-shaped extension could only have been produced at the very beginning, before the regular ongoing production model, otherwise it would have been a retrograde step.



Ustonson's Original Multiplying Winch. It introduced the mechanism which marked the birth of bass fishing and bait casters of America, also generations of multipliers in Britain.



Indication the winch was made in the maker's early period is the foot with 18 perforations for stitching to a leather pad, which was the earliest method of attaching an Ustonson winch onto a rod. The spike-foot and clamp-foot



Ustonson trade label. (Mullock's)

attachments, as well as being used at all periods, predate this method but there is at present no evidence the maker ever fitted either to any inscribed winch. It should also be noted that all

multiplying versions of the spike-foot and clamp-foot winches produced by other makers, have the gearing housed inside standard circular casings; thus applying the same principle, these can only have been made at a later date than the Ustonson multiplying winch with the crescent-shaped extension.

Everything, short of a statutory declaration signed by Onesimus himself, qualifies the newly discovered multiplying winch to be the very first the maker produced. However, what has to be absolute conclusive proof was found when the one piece, raised casing cover was removed to expose the gearing. The triple gearwheel multiplying and reversible check mechanism, which work in tandem, had been fitted within the confines of a standard circular winch and the extra space provided by the crescent-shaped extension was completely empty. The only possible explanation has to be the expensive extended variant casing had been made at the design stage before the first multiplying gear wheel mechanism could be tested and set in place. When it was finally assembled with the two mechanisms designed in tandem, the optimum working position of the gearing must have been more compact and closer to the centre of the winch than originally thought possible. With a slight adjustment, the entire workings could have been fitted more economically into one of the maker's standard circular winches and that is how all subsequent multiplying winches were produced.

The assessment of a winch made almost 250 years ago can never be an exact science but there is now enough knowledge of the maker's various models to arrive at an informed judgement as to its chronological place. In considering the alternative possibility that the newly discovered winch was not the very first multiplier to be introduced, then it can only be a model that came later and was assembled at a later date. That would have been at a time when Ustonson was producing standardised multipliers with the mechanism in the most economical

form of casing. Furthermore, most of the other London makers were offering what must have been competitive priced versions, often incorporating a simpler, inexpensive two wheel mechanism in circular casings and had been doing so shortly after Ustonson's earliest advertisement for a multiplying winch. The idea that Ustonson would at such a time, inexplicably go to the trouble and extra expense of producing a winch with a crescent-shaped extension on the side to provide extra space for gearing, knowing full well the fitting of his standard multiplying mechanism would leave the costly extension completely empty, is both illogical and an absurd consideration. Therefore, it can only have been commissioned at the design and experimental stage and when assembled became the maker's first model –

#### USTONSON'S ORIGINAL MULTIPLYING WINCH

Features include all brass construction, 2" diameter plus a  $\frac{5}{16}$ " crescent-shaped extension on the side of the casing, and  $2\frac{3}{8}$ " width. It comprises four pillars, one of which is larger in diameter and accommodates a line guide/level wind, turned ivory handle on curved off-set winding arm, brass foot with 18 pad perforations and fixed to the bridge with five rivets. The script engraving on the faceplate reads – 'Ustonson Maker Temple Bar London'.



Charles Farlow's multiplying mechanism in tandem with a variable check c1860, which was the same as Ustonson fitted to the original model 100 years earlier.



Magnificent compendium which houses Ustonson's Original Multiplying Winch together with contemporary items of tackle.

Winches were mainly of a small diameter and multipliers were used on the underside of rods when the earliest Ustonson multiplying winch was made in the mid-18th century. Onesimus Ustonson must have been brimming with ideas when he designed the first multiplier and everything suggests it was at the start of his new business venture or soon after becoming the proprietor of the Bell Yard shop. In addition to the first multiplying mechanism, the winch incorporated the first line guide and manual level-wind. A vertical bar with a hole at the height the line travelled, moved freely across two pillars, one of which was a special addition and of a larger diameter to carry the bar, thus demonstrating the attention to detail involved in the new design. There are line grooves made by the harsh abrasive horsehair line at the base of the rim of the brass guide. The existence and position of the grooves show the new innovation was used and furthermore the winch had been attached to the underside of the rod. The level-wind was manually operated but must have proved impractical, as there is no evidence at present of it ever being used again

on any other early winch. However, it demonstrated Ustonson's understanding of the basic principle and the fact he introduced the first device a century before Mark S Palmer of New Bedford was granted the earliest Patent No 27305 for a level-wind on February 28th 1860.

A magnificent compendium, that has provenance that traces back to the year it was made in 1825, now houses Ustonson's Original Multiplying Winch together with a variety of items, some of which are virtually its contemporaries. These include an 18th century gaff with folding handle and detachable hook believed to be one of the earliest surviving examples, a polished wood device for the many whipping tasks of the angler of that period, an unmarked multiplying winch with pad perforations and the tandem mechanism within a circular casing, a cast furnisher and bobbins containing horsehair, Indian Weed and silkworm gut, also a matching polished wooden box for flies and lures. Together the items make a truly impressive display of tackle from more than two centuries past.





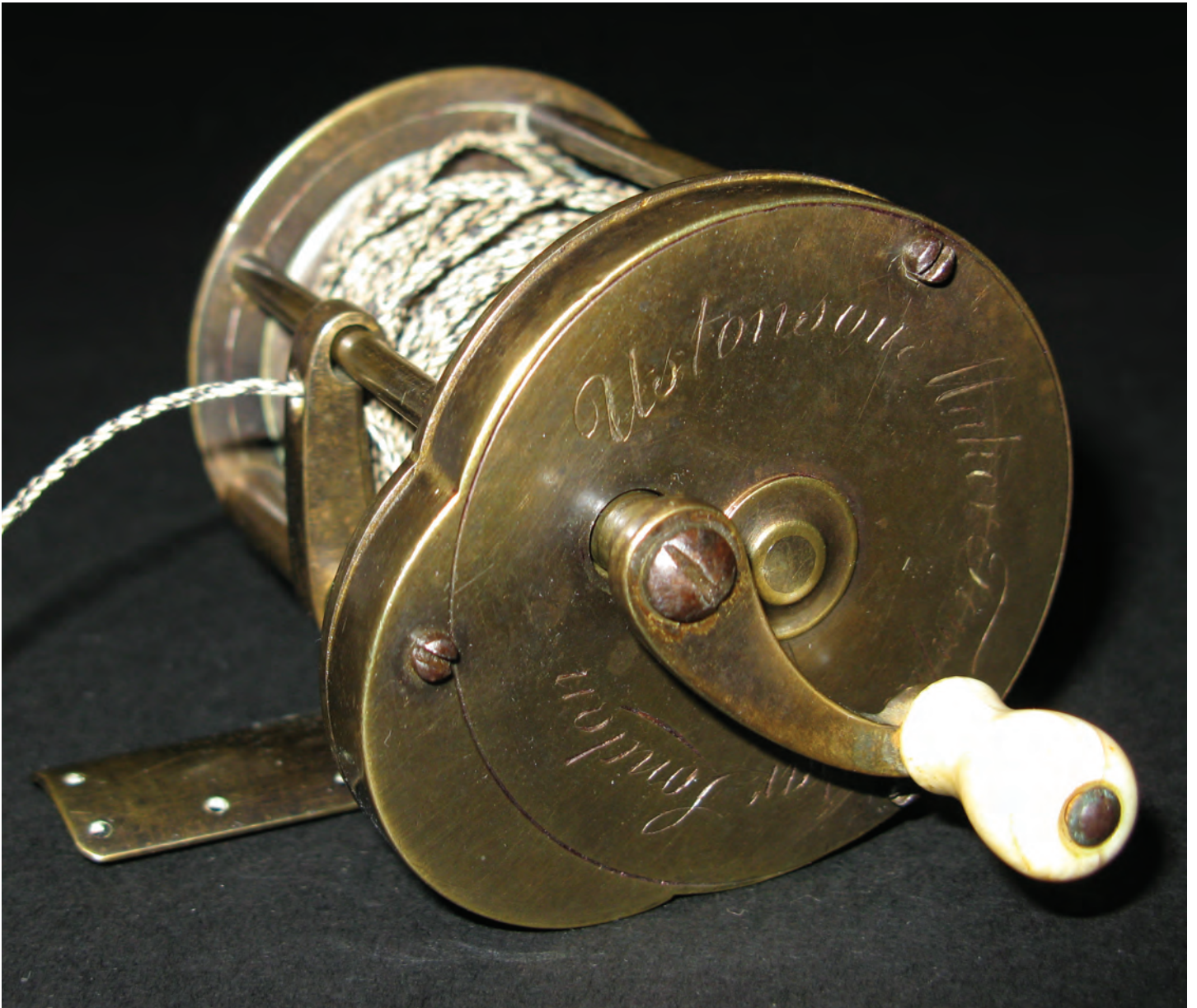
Ustonson's Original Multiplying Winch with the earliest line guide and manually operated level-wind. Set up with horsehair line, as it would have been used on the underside of a rod in the 18th century.



Line grooves in the soft brass rim of the guide made by the harsh abrasive horsehair line. Note the additional larger pillar along which the manual-level wind travelled.



The first multiplying mechanism that worked in tandem with a reversible check to give a smooth and precise winding action, thus precision engineering as early as the 1760s. The multiplying mechanism has been fitted within the confines of a standard circular casing and the crescent shaped extension is empty.



Legendary Ustonson's Original Multiplying Winch 1760s THE HOLY GRAIL OF COLLECTORS' FISHING REELS.

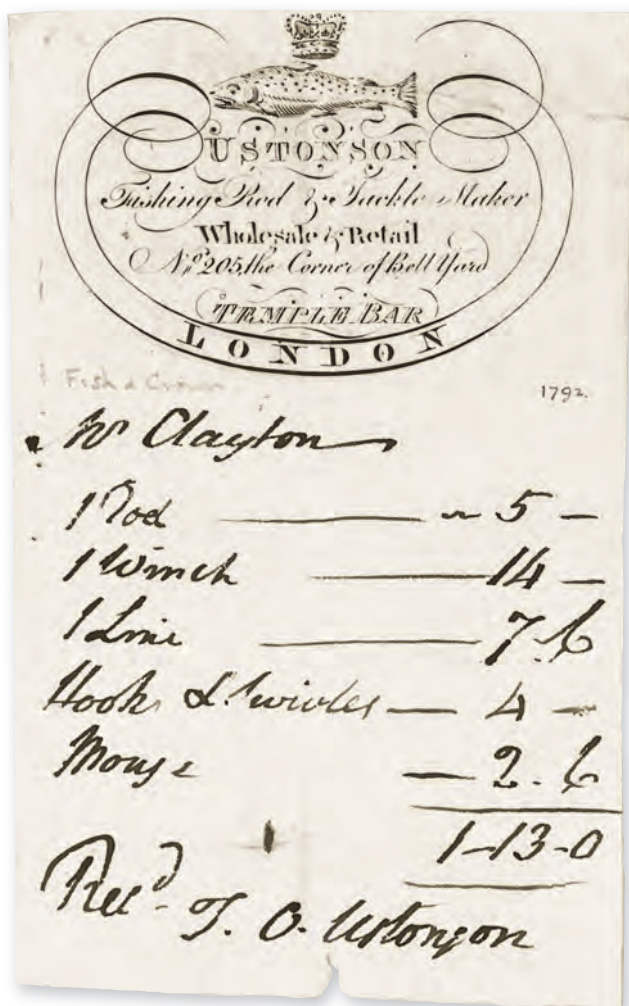
Printed at the end of the Ustonson story page 45, *Fishing Tackle: A Collector's Guide* (First Edition) published in 1989 –

*'My ultimate find would be an undamaged brass Ustonson winch, that I consider to be the most important of all collectors' reels. Such a discovery would be the epitome of Bell Yard and Crooked Lane and the London tackle shops with their trade cards. It would be a tangible piece of the antiquity of the early makers of which Ustonson was the most important, and it seems reasonable to believe that one day an Ustonson winch will be sold for a world record price.'*



### 1792-1808 USTONSON & SON

In 1792 the name of the business became Ustonson & Son trading from 205, Fleet Street, and it continued in that style up to 1808. The son was Thomas Onesimus, who had served his apprenticeship and become skilled, thus his name was added to the title of the business. It has been possible to confirm that he was working in the firm at that time by the discovery of a bill bearing his signature and dated 1792.



An invoice dated 1792 bearing the signature of Thomas Onesimus Ustonson.

### 1809-14 ONESIMUS USTONSON

In 1809 the business title reverted to Onesimus Ustonson, that suggests either the founder of the firm Onesimus senior had died or his son Thomas Onesimus had left the business. Trading continued with this title for another six years before the name Onesimus was removed forever.

There is documentary evidence of a letter addressed to Lord Bathurst who was Secretary of State for the Colonies dated July 28th 1819. It was from an Onesimus Ustonson residing at 6, Camomile Mews, Bishopsgate. It confirmed he was 30 years of age with a wife aged 20, a boy two years and a daughter 10 months. The letter stated their desire was go to the Cape of Good Hope.

### 1815-21 CHARLES USTONSON 205, Fleet Street.

Charles, a new member of the family and previously unknown, became head of the business in 1815 and ran the firm until 1821. The registered address of the business was changed to 204, Fleet Street around 1812.

### 1822-47 MARIA USTONSON trading as M USTONSON at 204, Fleet Street. 1846-47 at 48, Bell Yard.

By 1822 Charles Ustonson had died and his widow Maria became the sole proprietress and started to trade as Maria Ustonson or M Ustonson. Born Maria Pearce in 1784 in the parish of St George, Bloomsbury. She was married three times; first to Charles Ustonson in 1808, second to the portrait painter William Armfield Hobday in 1831 and third to Robert Joy on November 23rd 1833. Her second husband's son from his first marriage worked as an apprentice in the fishing tackle shop. However, he left and went on to become the famous painter George Armfield who specialised in dogs as the principle subject of his paintings.

The family business had built up a reputation for quality and established a personal service to important anglers and the aristocracy. Maria was destined to preside over a quarter century period of trading in which she not only maintained the same tradition but took the Ustonson name to greater heights by becoming fishing tackle supplier to three British Monarchs. On June 1st 1824 Mrs Maria Ustonson became Royal Warrant Holder to King George IV and was re-appointed by King William IV (1830-37) on his accession. The quality custom built reels supplied at that period were marked in script with the words 'Ustonson Maker to his Majesty, Temple Bar, London'. Later M Ustonson supplied tackle to Queen Victoria (1837-1901) and the markings were changed to 'Ustonson Maker to the Queen, Temple Bar, London.' It continued in that style up to 1848 when it became Ustonson & Peters.

Records of the Old Bailey proceedings give details of two cases involving Maria Ustonson and the fishing tackle business at 204, Fleet Street. The first was a theft from the shop on September 6th 1816. A Thomas Bonsey was

indicted for stealing 15 dozen swivels, two fishing reels, three dozen fishhooks and a box. Maria Ustonson stated – ‘The prisoner came into my shop to purchase some articles of fishing tackle on 6th September. I had seen the things in question in the glass case on the counter about an hour before. I went into the kitchen as was customary at that hour of the day and left a boy in the shop. He came down to me to ask the price of a flask. I told him the price and almost immediately afterwards I heard him call out ‘Halloo young man... what are you doing there’. I then ran up the stairs immediately and saw the prisoner run out of the shop’. Edward Stevency and Elizabeth Bolton were working in the shop and gave evidence. A further statement was made by Mr John Major, a City Waterman – ‘I was coming up Temple Lane and heard the cry Stop Thief, and the prisoner was running down the lane towards me but he turned into Pump Court. I picked up the property he threw away and delivered them up to Mrs Ustonson’s shop’. The prisoner was found guilty and given a six months prison sentence and ordered to pay one shilling fine.

The second case was one of fraud perpetrated by John Valentine on June 13th 1827 against Mrs Ustonson and her fishing tackle business. In evidence Mrs Ustonson stated – ‘I am a widow and keep a fishing tackle shop at 204, Fleet Street. On June 13th, George Smith my apprentice brought me a parcel and asked for 2s 6d for the carriage. The shop bell rang, Smith ran down and I told him to send my boy for the money. I gave the boy a half-crown to pay for the parcel as 2s 6d was written on it as charge for the carriage. Upon opening it I found two letters in it. One, which was unsealed, contained an order for goods to be packed and sent to No 14 Houndsditch that evening. I WAS BUSY HAVING AN ORDER TO COMPLETE FOR HIS MAJESTY and sent Smith to Houndsditch to ask if they could wait for the goods’.

In evidence George Smith stated – ‘I am an apprentice to Mrs Ustonson. On June 13th between two and four o’clock the prisoner brought the parcel to the shop, directed to Mrs Ustonson. He said there was a half-crown to pay for it. I took it upstairs and my mistress sent a half-crown down by the boy who I saw deliver it to the prisoner. I afterwards went to Houndsditch but could not find No 14. I found a Mr Johnson, an ironmonger but his name was not John and we have not supplied him with any articles’. The man was arrested in a public house in West Street on 15th June. The prisoner claimed he brought the parcel from the Edinburgh Mail. He was found guilty and given a 12 months prison sentence.

There was one more Old Bailey case involving a member of the Ustonson family but on that occasion the offence had no connection with fishing tackle. It does however, record the existence of another previously unknown male involved in the tackle business. A Joseph Ustonson, who described




A brass winch of 2 $\frac{3}{8}$ " diameter with curved crank and turned ivory handle, foot pierced with pad perforations. The handle plate with script engraving – ‘Ustonson Maker to the Queen, Temple Bar, London’.



A brass winch of 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ " diameter with curved crank and turned ivory handle. The handle plate inscribed – ‘Ustonson Maker to the Queen, Temple Bar, London’.



*The King's most Excellent Majesty*  
 29194  
 BY SPECIAL APPOINTMENT  
  
**BO: OF M. USTONSON,**  
**FISHING ROD & TACKLE MANUFACTURER,**  
 To His Most Gracious Majesty  
*N. 2011, Fleet Street, Temple Bar.*

London Jan 12<sup>th</sup> 1828.

1827	3 Plain multiply winches de engrave	11 " 1
May 24	2 Cheques do do	3 " "
	2 do do smaller	2 " 10
	3 Patent lines 60yds 2 do 30yds 2 silk do 60yds	8 " "
	0 the general rod thoroughly rep <sup>d</sup>	1 " 10
	4 H. fly rod do	1 " 4
	4 H. fly and bottom rod	1 " 6
	4 H. fly rod	1 " 4
	2 East India walks stick rods	3 " "
	Plain bamboo do	1 " 5
	3 Angling do	3 " 3
	10 bags to each 1 large do to contain all spikars de	2 " "
June 8	3 East India bamboo rods 3 steps to each de	12 " 12
	3 Multiply step winches	14 " 10
	Super make mahogany case for spinning arms de	6 " 6
	Green cases with partitions covers de the do	14 " 14
	2 landing sticks nets and rings	3 " "
	Large Pot of Salmon Roe	14 " 14
	Russian tackle can fitted de	2 " 17
	3 Patent lines 80 60 40yds each	3 " 10
	1 doz cockchafers 1 doz shrimps 1 doz beetles 1 doz horn flies 1 doz grasshoppers 1 doz bluebottles 1 doz wasps	8 " 2
	6 Super make large Pike flies de	3 " "
	Russian fly hook fitted	2 " 6
	6 P. roys de fitted 6 mice do 6 silver trout do	7 " 4
	12 large silver bleak do fitted	8 " 8
	12 large kill devils do 6 smaller do	8 " 16
	12 silver spinning minnows 12 large thews de	8 " 8
	12 smaller do fitted	3 " 3
	1 doz large bait tackle 6 smaller tackle	2 " 12
	6 Spinning do on gamp 2 doz minnow tackle	5 " "
	16 doz gut hooks 8 doz twisted gut hooks	3 " 12
	6 doz gimp hooks 1/2 doz tipped gut lines	5 " 14
		<u>139 " 11</u>

*M. Ustonson*

2/84

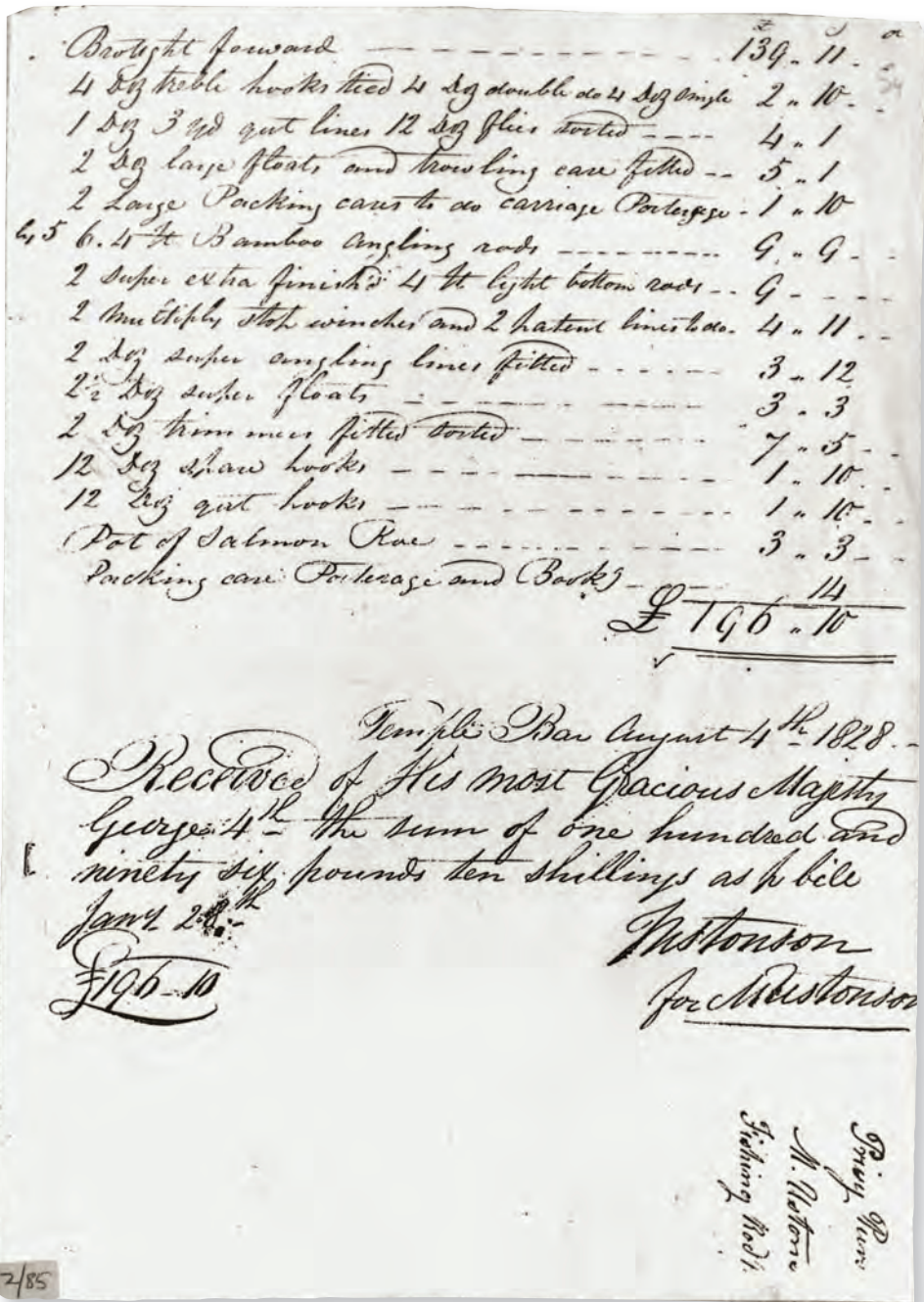
Invoice for fishing tackle supplied to King George IV in 1928. (HM The Queen. The Royal Collection)



himself as fishing tackle maker in Fleet Street, was returning home in an extremely drunken state at one o'clock in the morning on November 23rd 1828. He became involved and spent some time with a lady of the night by the name of Sarah Smith who stole two sovereigns from his pocket. She was found guilty and sentenced to be deported for 14 years.

In 1928, King George IV ordered large amounts of fishing tackle from M Ustonson to satisfy his favourite recreation on Virginia Water and the search for information about these

transactions has led to exciting discoveries. One of these was a document, kindly supplied by the Lord Chamberlain's Office from the archives of Windsor Castle. It was an invoice for tackle supplied by M Ustonson to King George IV dated January 28th 1828 and included so many items that the total cost came to £196 10s. The list included rods, winches, lines, hooks and many forms of bait including artificial frogs, mice, fish and Kill Devils. It is so detailed that it acts as a window to the fishing tackle trade and shows clearly what was being used and the cost in 1828.





One of the most important items at that period was described as 'The Royal Fishing Apparatus'. It was a magnificent case containing the finest fishing tackle made by Ustonson for His Majesty. It was returned to Maria early in 1828 to be refitted for the season, and upon completion she was given permission to put it on display for a few days before returning it to the King. *The Times* ran an article on May 21st 1828 that more or less gave the following description – The case is 3' long, 9" broad and 3" in depth and it is covered with the richest crimson morocco leather. The edges are sloped with double borders of gold ornaments representing alternately a salmon and a basket. The outer border forms a rich gold wreath of the rose, thistle and shamrock, intertwined with oak leaves and acorns. The centre of the lid represents a splendid gold impression of the royal arms of Great Britain and Ireland. The case is fastened with a Bramah's patent lock and the handle, eyes etc are all double gilt. The interior is lined throughout with Genoese sky blue velvet, the inner part of the lid tufted. At each end of the case are partitions for the books or cases for angling or fly-fishing which are the most chaste

and beautiful that one can imagine. The angling book is covered with the richest Genoese crimson velvet, the lock surmounted with a diadem of solid gold, the top ornamented with the Royal arms, richly worked and emblazoned, and beneath the shield appear the rose, thistle and shamrock. Inside the book is a beautiful emblematic ivory carved reel studded with silver which contains the lines, floats etc for bottom fishing and likewise partitions with an infinite variety of artificial bait of superior imitation. The fly-book on the outside greatly resembles the other with the difference that the lid is surmounted with a double G.R. enclosed in a semi-circle of richly embroidered wreath representing the rose, shamrock and thistle. The book is full of choice flies suitable for the different seasons etc and all of the most admirable manufacture. The books are lined with rich blue watered tabby silk corresponding with the case etc At the centre of the box on a raised cushion of Genoese sky blue velvet are the landing ring and net. The former is beautifully worked and the latter of gold coloured silk. On each side are the winches, clearing ring etc (in separate partitions) engraved



Magnificent case supplied by Ustonson to King George IV. The contents include a rod with spare pieces and holder, multiplying brass winch, pliers, large pike lure, net, clearing ring, ivory cast winder and cast book. (*HM The Queen. The Royal Collection*)



A brass multiplying winch with rim stop of approximately 2 1/4" diameter with curved crank and turned ivory handle. It is inscribed 'Ustonson Maker to his Majesty, Temple Bar' also the King's Crown and IV. This winch, together with a rod and the magnificent case and contents are displayed within a glass case at Kew Palace, London. (HM The Queen. The Royal Collection)



Fishing tackle of King George IV. Ivory cast-winder, pliers, cast book and large pike lure. (HM The Queen. The Royal Collection)

with the maker's name and crown of England. The rod has extra joints, tops etc and may be so altered to adapt to any sort of fishing. The rod and landing sticks are richly carved and engraved with royal emblematic devices, and the entire apparatus is acknowledged to be the most beautiful specimen of the art that has ever been manufactured.

Maria continued to run the business under the name of M Ustonson from 204, Fleet Street. That address also appears to have been the home that she shared with Robert Joy and two children. A population census form returned from 204, Fleet Street showed the following people in residence.

DATE OF CENSUS – 1841

Head of Household	Robert Joy	–	age 50 years
	Maria, female	–	age 50 years
	Henry, male	–	age 20 years
	Rosetta, female	–	age 15 years
Also servants	Alfred Hobday	–	age 15 years
	Rachael Bishop	–	age 15 years

In 1846 there was a change of business address from 204, Fleet Street, back to 48, Bell Yard.



Ustonson winch engraved 'Ustonson Maker to his Majesty, Temple Bar, London', sold 2006 in America by Lang's.





Ustonson & Peters 2¼" diameter winch with turned ivory handle on curved crank, fixed check in raised plate housing, plain foot faceplate engraved 'Ustonson & Peters Makers to the Queen, 48, Bell Yard, Temple Bar, London'. This winch was made between 1848 and 1855, the final period after almost a century of trading by the Ustonsons. It sold for £7,802 including a buyer's commission at Angling Auctions in 2008.



Ustonson rod on display at Kew Palace.

### 1848-55 USTONSON & PETERS

*48, Bell Yard.*

In 1847 William Peters started to make and sell fishing tackle from Ustonson's premises at 48, Bell Yard and the following year he entered into a partnership which lasted seven years. Reels produced during that period were marked - 'Ustonson & Peters, Maker to the Queen, 48, Bell Yard, Temple Bar, London'. It was in that name that an entry of fishing tackle was made for the Great Exhibition of 1851, and described as follows -

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USTONSON & PETERS, 48, BELL YARD, TEMPLE BAR.  
INVENTORS & MAKERS

Bamboo cane fly and salmon fishing rod. Each joint is formed of three triangular parts connected together from end to end. Box of artificial angling baits, including rare specimens of flies and insects, silkworm gut, taper fly line etc.

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### 1856-61 WILLIAM PETERS

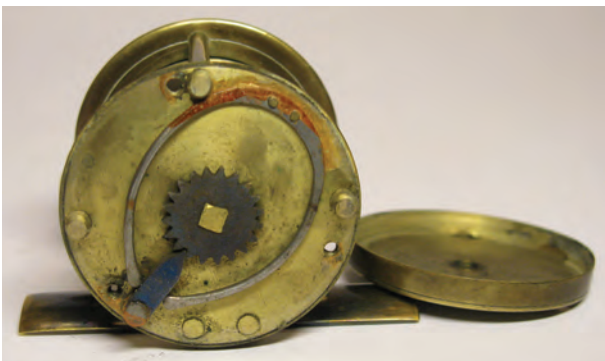
*48, Bell Yard.*

In 1856 the Ustonson name disappeared from the title of the business in the trade directories, which suggests either Maria had died or disposed of her interest to her partner. In October 2008 a plain winch was found bearing script engraving that read - 'W PETERS, Maker to the Queen 48, Bell Yard, Temple Bar, London'. This sensational discovery completed the final chapter of the Ustonson dynasty and prompted me to undertake further research in the trade directories. The result was rewarding, since evidence was found that William Peters continued to work from 48, Bell Yard up to and including the year 1861. He had the distinction of having traded from the most famous and longest running premises for fishing tackle, starting with Robert Hopkins (1700-30) and John Herro (1730-60s) followed by the Ustonson family who eventually accepted him as a partner. In 1862 he moved to 71, Long Acre where he continued to trade as William Peters & Son until 1864.

### 1862-64 WILLIAM PETERS & SON

*71, Long Acre.*

WILLIAM PETERS WINCH







William Peters plain brass winch 1 7/8" diameter with fixed check, turned ivory handle on curved crank, faceplate engraved 'W PETERS Maker to the Queen, 48, Bell Yard, Temple Bar, London', extra-fine condition.

At the present time it is the only known example of a William Peters winch made when he was a sole trader at the famous 48, Bell Yard, Temple Bar address from 1856-61. For the previous seven years he had been in partnership there with Maria Ustonson and produced winches inscribed 'Ustonson & Peters, Maker to the Queen'. a number of which have been found and sold both in Britain and America. This winch, apart from possibly being unique, is of supreme importance since it gives an ending to the final chapter of the Ustonson dynasty and the inscription 'Maker to the Queen' elevates William Peters to the status of being the only maker, apart from Ustonson and Ustonson & Peters, to engrave details of being the Royal Warrant holder to the British Monarch.