

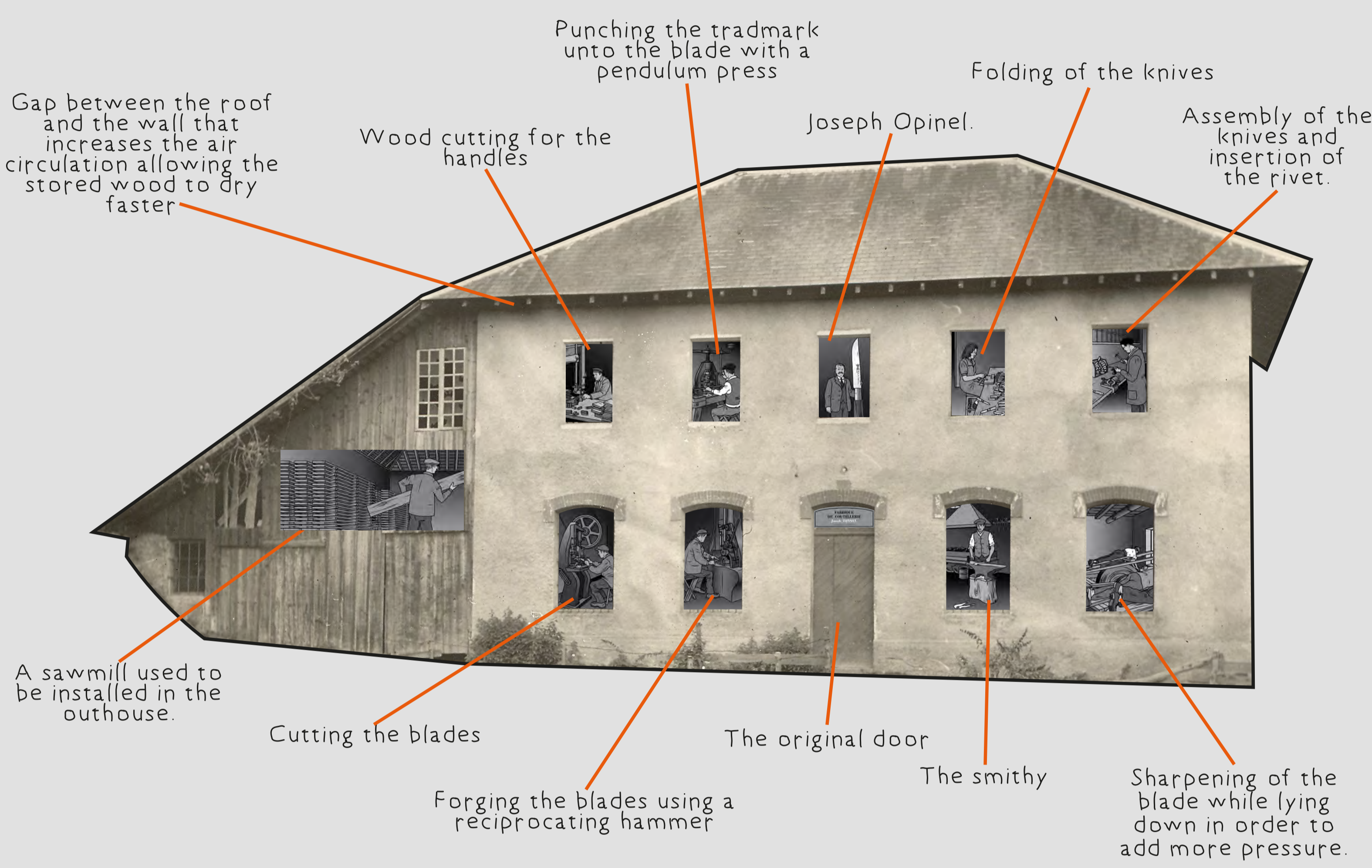
**“The factory by the bridge”**: the first Opinel factory

Joseph Opinel, the inventor of the famous Opinel knife, was 29 years old when he decided to start his own business in 1901. In order to modernize the knife production, he had this factory built. It's a classic example of early 20<sup>th</sup> century, rural, industrial architecture, shaped above all to accommodate the factory's needs.

The proximity to the Arvan-river and an underground system of canals, enabled Joseph Opinel to install a hydraulic turbine and a dynamo and thus to produce electricity. A part of this underground system has been excavated and can be seen on the other side of the factory!

The use of modern machines assured the uniformity of the knives and increased the production. The Opinel knives were therefore already well-known both nationally and internationally when Joseph registered the trademark in 1909.

**The factory explained**



**Cutlery**

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Joseph Opinel employed a dozen workers from the surrounding villages (see the picture below where Joseph, his wife Henriette and their three children (first row) are surrounded by their employees).

The artisanal activities exercised in the first factory are represented in the window (illustrated by Thomas Lemot).



**Towards Chambéry on muleback**

The Opinel knives quickly became popular. Joseph therefore wanted to expand his production and commercialize his knives closer to an urban center.

In 1916, during World War I, Joseph decided to relocate the production to Cognin, close to the old Savoy capital Chambéry.

This was, however, quite a challenge... The heavy machinery had to be transported to the railway station in Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne with mules and carts! Because of the war, most of the wagons were commandeered and Joseph found himself facing a shortage of wagons.

**Get to know the family**



Joseph Opinel (1872-1960) was born in Gévoudaz, the oldest son of the tool-maker Daniel Opinel. From the age of 12, he helped his father in the family smithy, making farming tools (such as billhooks and axes).

Joseph, a talented and curious man, was passionate about knives. In 1890, in a corner of his father's workshop, he perfected his now famous pocketknife. To improve his cutler skills, Joseph went to work in Thiers in 1896 [Thiers was and is considered the French "cutlery capital"].

Upon his return the following year, he modernized his father's workshop. That same year, Joseph married Marie-Henriette Sambuis. Together they had three children: Marcel, Léon and Angeline. In 1952, their sons took over the family business.