

## 14<sup>th</sup> Century Belt Knives

### History:

The most commonly found knives from the 14<sup>th</sup> C are wittle tang style. The knives here are based on ones in my collection, though similar knives can be found in both the Museum of London and The York Archaeological Trust. The sheath is custom fitted to the knife and the decoration is based on a number of sheaths from the same source. The cord is fingerloop braided linen, to add color and functionality to the piece.

### Construction:

Knives – the blades are forged from 1099 steel based on what the original knife might have looked like before going into the ground. The original size probably means they were inexpensive but functional, much like a modern pocket knife. One handle is boxwood, often considered the best wood for handles. The other handle is maple. The handle had a pilot hole drilled and then the tang was heated and burned into the handle for a custom fit. Once fully seated, it was dumped in a bucket of water to end the burning and lock in the blade. Though I have seen blades come loose over time, it is much more common for the blade to stay firmly seated for years using this method.

Sheaths – The sheaths are sewn on wet to custom fit to the knife. There are a number of examples of sheaths with simple fake heraldry from the late 14<sup>th</sup> Century found both in London and York., as well as the one in my collection. I just made up some fake heraldry as they would have, added a geometric design on the top, lightly tooled the leather with the design, and painted it with the paint I had on hand. I used acrylic leather paint instead of period pigments and a binder because of the durability issue. Having used period pigments in the past, a couple of Pennsics and the heraldry is almost unrecognizable. I worked as quickly as I could to duplicate the workmanship of a 14<sup>th</sup> C scabbard maker.

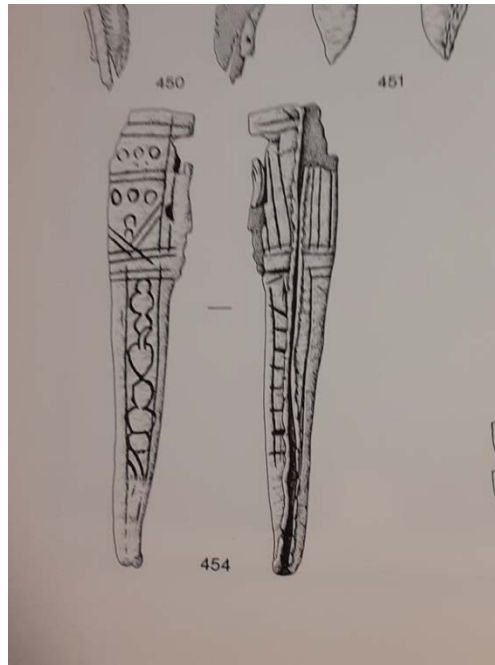
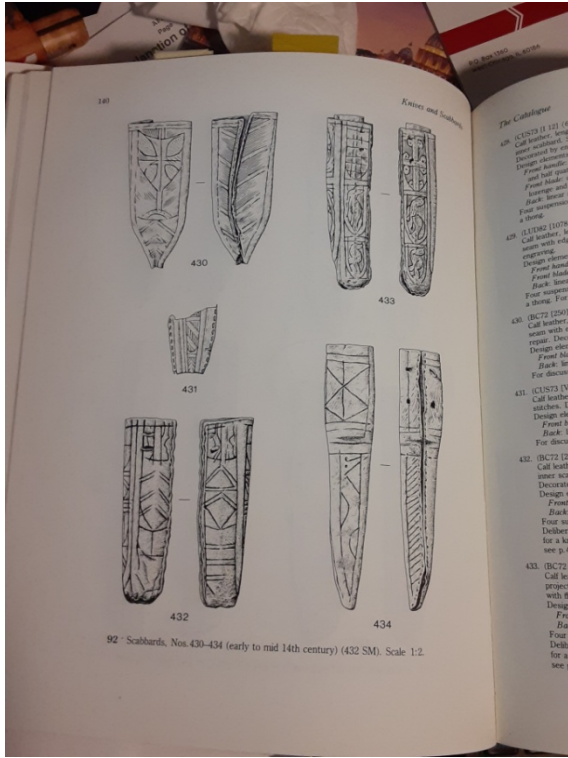
Cord – The cord is a standard 6 ply fingerloop braid. There is little evidence remaining of the original cords so I chose to use some colorful linen to make one, since the 14<sup>th</sup> century aesthetic dictates that more colors is always better.

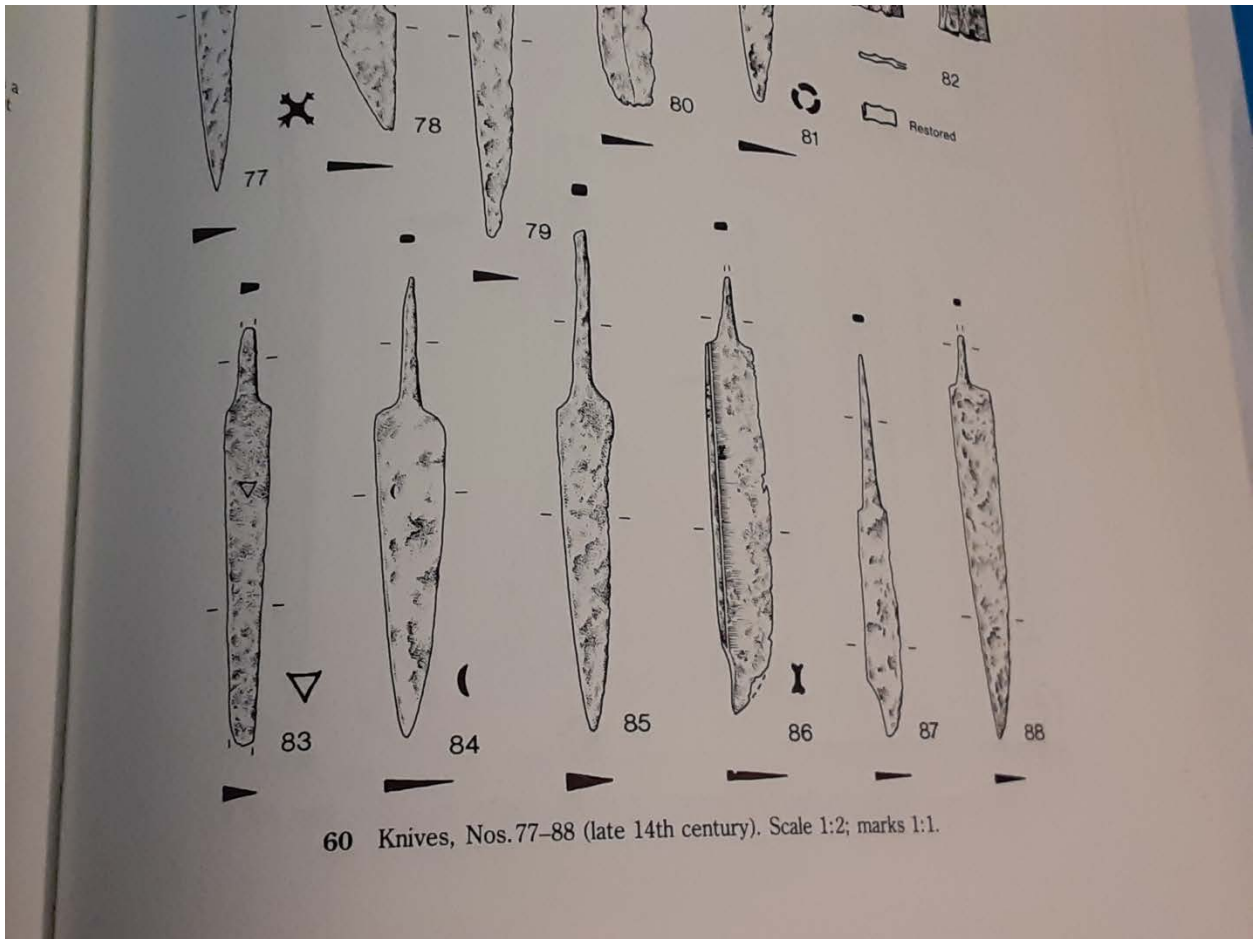
### Bibliography:

Knives and Scabbards, J. Cowgill, M. de Neergaard, and N. Griffiths, 1987.

Leather and Leatherworking in Anglo-Scandinavian and Medieval York, Quita Mould, Ian Carlisle, and Esther Cameron, 2003

Craft, Industry and Everyday Life: Finds from Medieval York, Patrick Ottaway and Nicola Rogers, 2002





**Late 14th-century knives Nos. 70-252**

This is the largest group of knives, and a variety of forms are represented including several with stepped backs. Grooves are the most common type of blade decoration, but there are also some examples with inlays (Nos 73, 92 and 98). Makers' marks will be common. One third of the knives have scale tangs, and most of these handles have decorative fittings; the whittle-tang handles by contrast are usually plain.

70. (BC72 [89] (2512))  
Blade, thickness 3mm. Whittle tang, length 112mm, set just below back, straight shoulder, tapering and projects beyond end of handle. Wooden handle (box), length 106mm, rectangular. Possibly a cleaver.
71. (BC72 [150] (4319))  
Blade, length 145mm, width 19mm, thickness 3mm, marked, widens towards tip. Whittle tang, set just below back, sloping shoulder.
72. (BWB83 [310] (590))  
Blade, length 160mm, thickness 3mm, marked. Whittle tang, set just below back, straight shoulder. Possibly a cleaver.
73. (BWB83 [359] (404))  
Blade; decorated with a line of inlaid 'x's (copper/zinc alloy), edge curves to back.
74. (SH74 [280] (56))  
Blade, length 115mm, edge curves to back. Whittle tang, set just below back, straight shoulder, tapering. Wooden handle (holly). Very corroded.
80. (BWB83 [256] (105))  
Blade, width 21mm, thickness 4mm. Whittle tang, set just below back, straight shoulder, tapering. Wooden handle (alder), cylindrical.
81. (BWB83 [298] (412))  
Blade, length 111mm, width 22mm, thickness 3mm, marked, triangular. Whittle tang. Wooden handle (?maple), oval section. Hilt band (tin). Possible weld lines visible on the x-radiograph.
82. (TL74 [2332] (2342))  
Copper alloy handle, copper alloy sheet tube; decorated with incised lines and stamped out quatrefoils.
83. (CUS73 [IV 10] (69))  
Blade, width 13mm, thickness 4mm, marked, triangular. Whittle tang, set just below back, sloping shoulder, tapering.
84. (BWB83 [369] (760))  
Blade, length 89mm, width 18mm, thickness 4mm, marked, triangular. Whittle tang, length 38mm, cent on blade, sloping shoulder, tapering.
85. (BWB83 [298] (176))  
Blade, length 93mm, width 16mm, thickness 5mm, triangular. Whittle tang, length 49mm, central on blade, sloping shoulder, tapering.
86. (BC72 [150] (4312))  
Blade, length 109mm, width 16mm, thickness 2mm, marked; decorated with a groove and notches on t