

A Composite Ivory/Iron Object from East Halton (EHAG).

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An object composed of iron and ivory was submitted for identification and assessment. The object, from context 004, comprises two pieces of lathe-turned ivory, an iron tang and possibly a copper alloy finial/rivet.

The object is probably a knife handle and is complete from the start of the blade to the end of the handle. The handle tapers towards the blade, starting at 14mm and finishing at 10mm diameter. At the end furthest from the blade are two lathe-cut zones of banding, 5 bands in one and 7 in the other. The bands themselves are c.0.7mm wide. At this end of the handle a separate piece of ivory was placed, cut with its layers running at right angles to those on the main handle. An ogival-curved finial has been turned on the smaller piece. Traces of copper are present where the iron tang emerges at the end of the handle. These may indicate the existence of a copper alloy knob or rivet. There may have been a non-ferrous ferrule at the junction of the blade and the handle but none is visible by eye. There is, however, an area of corrosion in which evidence for such a ferrule might survive.

Ivory and bone handles, sometimes turned on a lathe but usually worked freehand, occur on medieval knives. By the end of the 14th century it was more normal for these handles to consist of plates of material on either side of a scale tang, to which they were riveted. However whittle-tang knives continued to be produced, up to the present day. The size and form of handle suggests that it was a specialised tool, used for dining, or peeling fruit perhaps. Probably of late or early post-medieval date.

Radiography is required to investigate the composition of the object further. This should pay particular attention to the two ends of the object where non-ferrous elements may have been present. Once the x-ray plate has been studied the object should be illustrated.