

[Edition 2](#) was published in July 2024.

**HISTORY OF THE BARLOW KNIFE.
“AN IMPORTANT PART OF ENGLISH CUTLERY HISTORY”
1670-2024**



1725-1800s



C1790-1890s



C1800s



C 1850-1891

**REVISED AND EXPANDED SECOND EDITION.
BY KEVIN COLEMAN**

COVER PHOTOS.

Samuel Barlow - Barlow c.1725-1820s, - see page 13.

Furness Barlow by George Furness & Son C 1790 see page 14.

Furness Barlow c1800s see page 15.

Barlow by Squire Elijah Oates see page 10.

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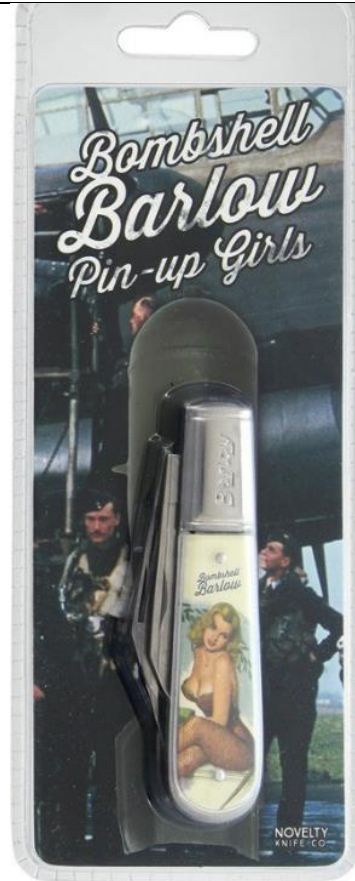
First edition December 2023

Revised and expanded Second edition June 2024

INTRODUCTION TO EDITION 2

This second and expanded edition of the “History of the Barlow Knife 1670 – 2024” is the result of the considerable feedback that followed the publication of the First Edition on the CASK website (www.CASK.info) in December 2023. This much appreciated feedback from various sources but in particular from collector and author on the history of cutlery in Hallamshire Michael Dyson required a complete rethink of the assumptions underlying the foundation narrative of the “Barlow knife” that was presented in the First Edition. It must however be emphasized that this second edition is still a ‘work in progress’ as further research and local knowledge will continue to revise and refine the foundation narrative.

The iconic Barlow 354 years on, continues to be the functional working pocketknife they were originally designed to be. In addition, the Barlow knife has become a symbol of the old west and used to celebrate other historic events such as the pin-up girls painted on Bombers during World War Two.



Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the western star Zoro, 1919-2019 and the pin-up girls of World War Two. Knives from the authors collection.

AUTHOR'S OVERVIEW

This monograph, *History of the Barlow Knife 1670-2024*, is written as a research paper, laying the foundation stones, as it were, for those collectors with a passion for Barlow pocketknives.

As I will discuss in this monograph, the origin of the Barlow knife began in England as far back as the 1670s with the early cutlers being Obadiah Barlow, Samuel Barlow, Luke Oates and his family (*who played a major role in the Barlow story as I will discuss*) and the Furness family. There will be no doubt other early cutlers who made a Barlow pattern are yet to come to light. One such example is a Barlow marked "R.D Hardy Bros, Sheffield" which recently sold on eBay. I have not been able to find any information on this maker. By the design of this Barlow, I would date it possibly from early to mid-1800.

The other major player in the early Barlow story is America. Early English cutlers exported Barlow's in large quantities to colonial America. John Russell Cutlery Co of Green River Works Massachusetts which began in 1834 and continued until 1936 became one of the first firms to mass produce the Barlow style in America.

Folding knives have been part of our history since Roman Times. The characteristics of knives have changed over the years but one knife which has stood the test of time over the last 354 years is “*the Barlow*”.

Whilst this monograph is primarily looking at the history of the Barlow Knife as we have come to know it, we must first consider the origins of that style knife.

As I mention in the opening pages, knives with long bolsters predate what I shall refer to as the 1st generation Barlow. It is also worth noting the long history of rural cutlers who I believe were most likely responsible for the design of the long bolster.

During my research I found much of the information on the history of the Barlow varied in different articles. Hence this monograph is my attempt to clarify the history as far as one can.

One comment I must make from the start is that I have found it difficult in some ways to use the right terminology when referring to what has generally been referred to as the ‘original’ Barlow.

I will be using two terms, 1st generation and original Barlow. Both terms are correct in the context in which they are used. When referring to knives produced by Obadiah Barlow, I will use the term 1st generation. When referring to the court cases and the knives designed by Samuel Barlow, Oates and Furness, I may revert to the term original in the context of the court cases.

Another factor which has made writing this monograph difficult is that I have been unable to find a knife unquestionably designed by Obadiah Barlow. Even with John Jnr in the late 1700s exporting knives to the American Colonies no example has been found.

What struck me whilst researching the history of the Barlow knife was the apparent wide distribution of the Barlow style knife. While we seem to focus on England and America, my research led me to search the Australian Archives.

A story in the Childrens Page “*Two Young Crusoe’s*” in the Dawn newspaper (Sydney NSW), Wednesday 1 February 1905 tells of the adventures of boys in rural NSW, Australia’s own “Tom Sawyer”. “*With trembling hands, he and Nick emptied every pocket, until a little pile of coins, handkerchiefs, **Barlow knives**, fishhooks and other boyish treasures lay at their feet¹.*”

In the Melbourne Age (a major Victorian newspaper) on Thursday 25th of January 1912 was an article headed; “*Theft from the Wharfs.*” *The article went on to describe how the accused had stolen 31 doz. Knives valued at 10 pounds. These knives were branded “**Barlow**”².*

When one stops to think, that was 372 Barlow's imported just into Victoria. Research also showed that most pocketknives were imported from England at that time.

Dennis Smith in his self-published book "The Cutlery Industry in the Stannington Area"³ states that many of the knives made by Rural/Farmer cutlers were shipped to Australia.

Accordingly, this monograph is my attempt to clarify the history of the Barlow story - for inclusion on the Website, **CASK, Collectable Antique Sheffield Knives**, produced by collector and proprietor, Lawrie Wilson.

If any collectors have further information or comment they feel may help to clarify the Barlow narrative, I am always happy to hear from them as I know there are many gaps to fill. Hence this will be a work in progress.

HISTORY OF THE BARLOW KNIFE.

Court case reported in Sheffield independent newspaper 3 February 1864.

*"The distinction in this case was that the "Barlow Knife", though its specialty, was that it had long bolsters, was called the "Barlow knife," not on the account, but because it was the invention and special manufacture of the Barlow's whose name it bore-----"*⁴

To my mind this sums up the Barlow debate.

My interest in the Barlow story began many years ago but it wasn't until recently that I fully realized the longevity of the Barlow design. To many collectors the story of the Barlow began with Obadiah Barlow in 1670, Sheffield England when he first produced the "Barlow" pocketknife as we have come to refer to them today. This was prior to the start of the industrial revolution in c.1760; however these knives could be produced in bulk because they were a standard design. This had the impact of reducing the cost of production, hence making these knives more affordable to the general working class.

The Barlow has long been viewed as an inexpensive but excellent quality pocketknife to meet the needs of those working in rural England and Colonial America, such as farmers and the like. The knife was a slip joint and in those early years made with a one-piece cast-iron liner and a long integral bolster. The blades were steel, presumably carbon steel and the scales were made of horn, bone or even wood, and the scales are referred to as a 'tear drop scale'.

The following photo illustrates the use of cast iron bolster and liner. (The markings are those by the Oates Family.





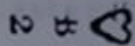

Photo courtesy of the Dyson collection.

The knife originally only had one blade, either a spear point or clip blade. Over time a pen blade was added.

The purpose of the long bolster was to make the pocketknife stronger, and when the pen blade was added - strong enough to accommodate both blades hinging from the same end.

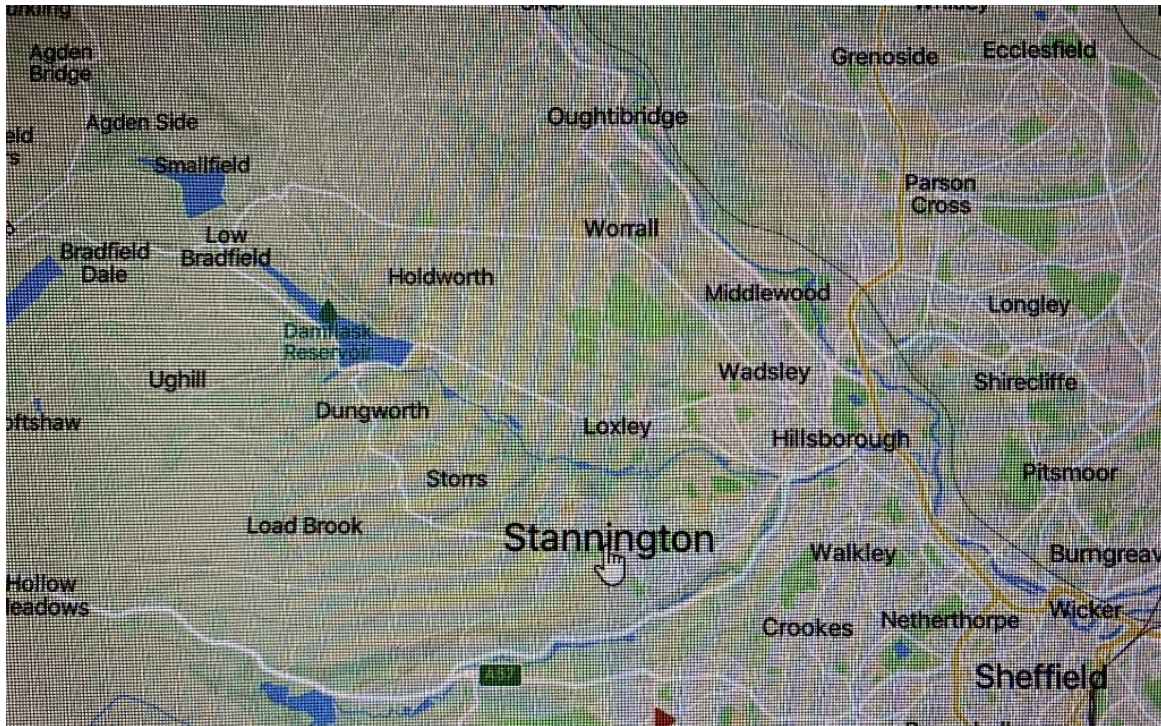
According to Bernard Levine in his book "Levine's Guide to Knives and their Values"⁵ knives manufactured by 'Obadiah Barlow' simply had Barlow marked on the Blade. It was not until John Barlow Jnr took over the business that he registered the trademark "BAR LOW" (over two lines) in 1745, see plate following.

Samuel Barlow of Neepsend, near Sheffield also produced the "Barlow" style knife, although there appears to be no connection between the two Barlow families. According to Levine, Samuel Barlow's trademark in 1787 was  (described by Levine as a *sideways "Z", a small circle and a picture of a scimitar (a short, curved Oriental sword)*): However, that trademark was granted by the Company of Cutlers in 1725, and according to Levine, in 1798 the the word "Barlow" was added to his trademark⁶.

The S H E F F I E L D		
Arnal Abram, spotted knife, Darnall, near Sheffield.	}	ARNAL
Arundel John, spring knife, Millands.		
Barlow John, penknife, Campo- lane.	}	BAR LOW
Barnes Isa. spring knife, Campolane.		BARNES
Barnes Thomas. penknife, Scotland.	}	LOVE
Barnes Isaac, springknife, Bridge- houses		
Barlow Samuel, flag penknife Neepsend near Sheffield.	}	

The plate above from “*Sketchley’s Sheffield Directory*”⁷ shows the trademarks for Barlow, John Campo-Lane (being “BAR LOW” over two lines), and for “Barlow, Samuel, stag penknife Neepsend near Sheffield”, being the sideways “Z, a small circle and a picture of a scimitar (a short, curved Oriental sword)” as illustrated above.

In reality, knives with long bolsters had been produced throughout English rural towns and communities such as the Stannington Area for many years prior to their use by Obadiah Barlow.



Authors illustration -- Rural cutlery towns

Five of the many rural towns which played a major role in these early years were *Stannington, Bradfield, Dungworth, Loxley* and *Wakley*. Dennis Smith in his book states there were 18 cutlers with 9 apprentices in Dungworth alone.⁸ These towns are located Northwest of Sheffield.

These knives had a long bolster and a single blade. As stated, the long bolster made the knife far stronger, which would have been an advantage for the tasks carried out either by farmers or other tradesman at that time.

It wasn't until I started my research and read the books by Michael Dyson, “*The Dyson family of Cutlers*”⁹ and the late Dennis Smith “*The Cutlery Industry in The Stannington Area*”¹⁰ that I fully appreciated the extent and longevity small Rural Cutlers had on the knife making industry in those early years. Many of these small cutlers were also farmers or had other trades as well.

Dennis Smith in his book states that the Wardle and Bentham's Directory of 1814-1815 indicates there were some 33 pocketknife makers in Stannington, Dungwood and Bradfield alone¹¹.



Author's collection.

The knives in the above Plate were recovered by “mud larkers” from the river Thames. Both knives have the characteristics of a Barlow, long bolsters and are similar in size. However, the top knife is a fixed blade, and may be an early farmer's or workman's knife made before the knife pattern made by Obadiah Barlow.

The second knife, which is a folding knife, also has the characteristics of a Barlow style knife. However, I am yet to confirm whether this is an early “Barlow style” or another example of what I will refer to as a workman's knife.

The main point I want to convey is that knives with the long bolster appear to predate the 1st generation Barlow knife produced by Obadiah Barlow.

From my research it appears fair to conclude that Obadiah Barlow was the first cutler to produce what I will refer to as the 1st generation Barlow style knife and use the term and trademark “Barlow” which has become the generic term used when referring to this style knife today.

During the 1800s there were several court cases regarding the right to use the term “original” Barlow.

According to Bernard Levine¹², Obadiah Barlow together with his successors John and John Jnr had exclusive use of the name “Barlow.” Further we have established that Samuel Barlow registered the trademark, sideways Z and scimitar in 1725 and the name Barlow in 1798.

Obadiah Barlow's line continued to use the trademark mark Bar/low (BAR over LOW) on their knives. Tweedale¹³ quotes in his book *"Obadiah and his Descendants manufactured such excellent pens and pocket cutlery as to make their name famous"*.

It is after John Jnr's (Barlow) death that we need to examine the court cases to get an overview of the legal right or claim to use the term "original" Barlow. Notwithstanding my earlier comment, in the context of the following court cases the word "original" is the correct terminology. In my summing up later in this monograph I will put my argument to support my conclusion, and indeed what seems to be the accepted view that Obadiah Barlow produced the 1st generation Barlow as we have come to refer to them.

As previously noted, there has been much debate over many years as to who first produced the 1st generation Barlow knife and was granted the first Barlow trademark. Articles reporting on Court cases have been covered in the Sheffield Independent Newspaper over the ownership of the Barlow trademark on the following dates: 9 May 1840, 3 February 1864, 6 February 1864, and 7 January 1865 with the last one noted on the 2 March 1886. In his letter to the editor on 2 March, Henry Barlow Mills (see following for details) also refers to another case 15 July 1843 *"when a man called Garrett had to appear for fraudulently using the mark"* (i.e. Barlow).

In the Sheffield Independent Newspaper of 2 March 1886¹⁴ under the heading *"Honest Cutlery"* the article quotes in part, *"as many of your readers (the writer of "Honest Cutlery" included) will not know the difference between the Barlow knife and a counterfeit. I should like to give a little information respecting the same."* The author of the article - Henry Barlow Mills, goes on to state how it was *"his family that was granted the mark by the Cutler's Company to a member of my family as far back as 1720"*, the article is signed *"Yours respectfully, Henry Barlow Mills, Barlow Cutlery Works, Neepsend, March 1st, 1886"*. Henry Barlow Mills married the sister of Samuel Barlow and eventually took over operating the business.

Without going into the details of all the previous court cases, the above article was simply re-enforcing the fact that over the years the Barlow trademark or name had been used by many cutlers producing the same style pocketknife as the "Original Barlow "or 1st generation Barlow. The origin of the case seems to go back to around 9 May 1840 when it was reported in the Sheffield Independent Newspaper¹⁵ *"that Mr. Samuel Barlow charged Mr. Luke Oates cutler of Stannington with stamping a mark on his knives, with the intent to imitate and counterfeit a mark legally granted by the Corporation of Cutlers to him [Samuel Barlow]."*



Barlow by Luke Oates's son (Luke Oates 1799-1875)., Squire Elijah Oates & Sons (1836-1891).
Authors collection

The following article is part of the report on the court hearing from the Sheffield Independent Newspaper 9 May 1840 reporting on the case brought by Samuel Barlow against Luke Oates.

The article mentioned on page 9 above by Henry Barlow Mills 2 March 1886 was again stating the fact the original trademark was granted to his family in 1720. The exact date was 1725.

TOWN - HALL.

FRIDAY.—Before the Rev. W. ALDERSON, H. WALKER, Esq., and C. BROWNELL, Esq.

RIGHT OF MARKS. —Mr. Luke Oates, cutler, of Stannington, was charged by Mr. Samuel Barlow, of Brightside Bierlow, with stamping a mark on his knives, with intent to imitate and counterfeit a mark legally granted by the Corporation of Cutlers to him (Samuel Barlow.) Mr. Wilson, on behalf of the Corporation, and Mr. Palfreyman for the defendant. Mr. Wilson first put in a grant by the Company of the mark Z and falchion, to Mr. Barlow, which is now rented by a manufacturer named Mills, who married into the family of the person to whom the mark was granted. He then called a Mr. Ward, who produced a number of knives (proving that he bought them of the defendant,) marked with the ace of clubs and falchion, which Mr. Wilson contended approached so nearly to Mr. Barlow's mark as to be an imitation or counterfeit. Besides this, he submitted to the Bench the label upon the paper in which the knives were wrapped. The label bore the name, Luke Oates and Sons, Stannington, styling them manufacturers of the original Barlow knives, and with a *nota bene* that all knives of the kind not marked with the ace and falchion and the name of Oates, were spurious. In cross-examination, Mr. Palfreyman elicited from Mr. Ward the distinction between the two marks, and the fact that Oates's mark is accompanied with his name, and Barlow's with his, but still he considered it a decided imitation. He produced a letter, which had been the occasion of his going to Oates for the knives, asking for genuine Barlow knives, and saying, that if the price were low, he could sell a great quantity of them. He stated that Mr. Mills sold his knives at 2s. 9d. per doz., but the imitations were sold at 1s. 10d. . . Mr. Palfreyman, in reply, contended that the Barlow knife was well known as a particular form of knife, just as the Wharnccliffe knife was, and might be made by any body. He should also shew that the mark used by Oates was not an imitation of Barlow's mark, but was a mark granted to the late Mr. Gregory, in 1797, by the Cutlers' Company, and sold by his son to the defendant about five years ago. He argued that the distinction between Oates's

Reproduced courtesy of the British Library Board.

Dennis Smith in his book *"The Cutlery Industry in the Stannington Area"* quotes the following in relation to the court case of May 1841.

"In 1864 Mr. Mills successor to Samuel Barlow the Neepsend cutler was still producing the distinctive long-bolstered "Barlow" springknives, which had their origins in the 18th century. Stannington cutlers were also producing a rough kind of Common "Barlow" knife. Luke Oates of the Alpha works Stannington had been convicted for striking the Barlow trademark on his knives in 1841. In 1864 he was found to have circulated labels with his knives claiming them as the "old original Barlow knives".¹⁶

Smith goes on to say that Oates sold his knives cheaply to compete with Mills on the American market.

Notwithstanding the above, it is generally considered by historians that the 1st generation Barlow knives were produced by Sheffield cutler Obadiah Barlow who started business in 1667¹⁷. From my own research I tend to concur with this view. Bernard Levine quotes in his book “Levine’s guide to Knives and their value” that Obadiah Barlow’s grandson John, succeeded him in 1710, with John Barlow jnr. succeeding John in 1745. According to Levine the Barlow family had exclusive use of the trademark “Barlow” by “itself” during the time they were in business.¹⁸

Tweedale¹⁹ states the trademark “Barlow” was granted to John Barlow Junior in 1745. John Barlow Junior died 27 April 1799, thus bringing an end to this line of Barlows.

Large quantities of the Barlow knives produced by Samuel Barlow and John Barlow Junior along with Oates and Furness were exported to America. According to Smith in his paper “Old Original Barlow 2001” exports to America declined during in the last decades of the 19th century due to cheap imports from Germany and mass production in the local American industry of Barlow style knives.

The following photo sourced from the internet displays a selection of actual Barlow knives made by the Barlow family in Sheffield. As an observation, apart from the two Barlow’s on the far right, the markings on the blades are the sideways “Z” and a “scimitar” therefore these knives would be by Samuel Barlow.



Source Internet Download ²⁰

The Barlow, second from the right with an Arrow, Heart and Bugle on the bolster according to an ad shown by Tweesdale²¹ the marking is Luke Oates and Co. The marking on the Barlow far right I am yet to identify.

An important marking to note on the plate below is on the centre knife. It has the trademark “Barlow” under the sideways Z and scimitar which was registered and added in 1798. I will discuss this further in my closing summary.

I believe the example below which measures 3 1/16th inches closed, may well be made by Samuel Barlow, who was still listed in the Directory of Sheffield Cutlers in 1823, and therefore, this knife could date from the 1720s to c.1820s. Note that the blade has lost 70% – 80 % of its original profile due to sharpening. It is assumed that it was originally a spear blade, but could also have been a clip blade as both were in use at that time.



Authors collection, courtesy of a generous gift by CASK publisher Lawrie Wilson

My reason for this conclusion is when you compare the steel pins, there are four pins in very “similar” positions to the Samuel Barlow knives shown in the above plate.

Together with the Barlow by Luke Oates, second from the right they are the only *early* Sheffield Barlow styles to use four pins in the scales that I am aware of.

The ring at the top of the bolster is clearly visible in two or three of the above knives.

The tang pin is also visible on the Samuel Barlow shown in the middle of the above plate.

Finally, the Samuel Barlow markings, “sideways Z and scimitar” are normally located on the blade, and given this blade is well worn it is very likely the trademark has been worn away on this example.

Notwithstanding my comments above, one must consider another possibility, that the knife was made by a cutler working as a sole trader or indeed a rural cutler. It is my understanding that these cutlers were not concerned with putting their markings on their knives.

One other English firm of cutlers to produce the Barlow style knife is the Furness family from Stannington, England, which is just outside Sheffield. Furness’s name appears in the Sheffield directories 1774 to 1787. The Furness family were producing Barlow style knives well into the early 1900s. According to Levine the Furness Barlow’s were being exported to America well before the 1870s and up to 1915.²²

There appears to have been several family markings on their knives, Enos Furness & Sons, Martha Furness & Sons, Edward Furness & Sons, and George Furness & Sons.²³

The following plates are early examples of Barlow knives produced by the Furness family. The first example marked "EF&S" on the bolster would be Enos Furness & Sons (Enos Furness 1836-1905) with Furness on the blade. The knife measures 3 3/16th inches closed.



Photo courtesy of Paul Stamp

Example marked "G.F &S" is by George Furness & Sons.



Photo courtesy of Neil Champion



Photo courtesy of the Dyson collection.

The above plate shows further examples of knives made by the Furness family.

The plate following showing knives marked O.N.B on the tang is another example of an early Barlow style which, based on two other examples I have studied, was most likely made by Furness in the Stannington area. It has cast-iron liners and integral bolsters. I have yet to establish what O.N.B stands for. Based on the other examples it would appear these are very rare and date to the 1800s.



Authors Collection.

The design of the Barlow knife was simple and yet sturdy. The simple design and mass production techniques kept the costs down and meant the average person could own a Barlow knife.

Many collectors consider America to be where the Barlow knife really gained popularity. In the early colonial days of America, wood was the predominate material used to produce many household items and farm implements.

According to an article in the Revolutionary War Journal²⁴ George Washington was given a Barlow by his mother.

The Barlow knife could be carried in the pocket and was therefore on hand when needed to carry out repairs or even to whittle new wooden items such as spoons etc.

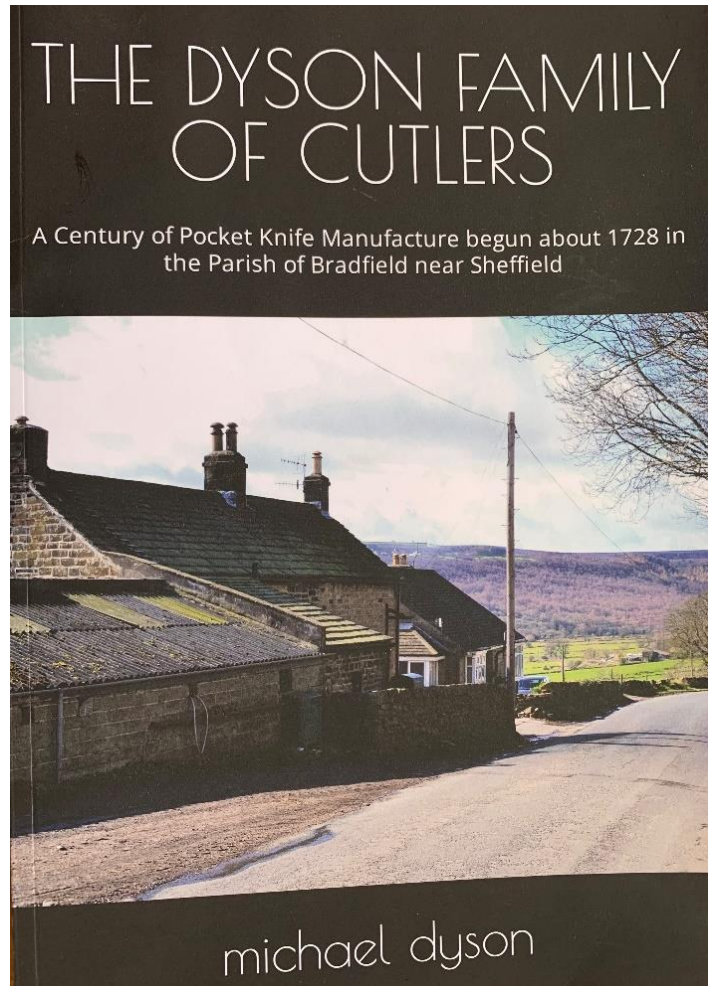
The knife shown overleaf from Smith's Key publication of 1816 which is a catalogue of knives at that time have been erroneously regarded as a Barlow.

Notwithstanding the word Barlow is inscribed on the blade just near the tang, according to Smith's Key the knife is actually a pen knife. Michael Dyson in his book "The Dyson Family of Cutlers"²⁵ also shows this pattern as a pen knife and shows an actual example

from the Dennis Smith collection. According to Dyson actual examples of the early pen knife are very rare as they did not seem to be collected.



Barlow knife from "Smiths Key" catalogue 1816. Author's photo



Authors photograph of "The Dyson Family of Cutlers "front cover" which I consider essential reading for collectors interested in Barlow's and the early English cutlery industry. This book is an important book of my collection.

The First American to 'mass produce' the Barlow style knife seems to be acknowledged as Cutler John Russell in his Greenfield factory, Massachusetts around 1875. John Russell commenced his cutlery business in 1834 and marked his knives with an R dissected with an arrow on the bolster²⁶.

The plate below is a single blade Barlow by John Russell marked with the "R" dissected with an arrow c.1875-1884. It has a spear point blade, bone scales, steel pins and measures 3 ¼ inches closed. Russell is marked on the mark side of the tang.



Authors collection.

The two plates below show two blade Barlow's with a spear point blade and a smaller pen blade by John Russell c1875 to 1884. The John Russell marking "R" dissected with the arrow is on the bolster and John Russell on the tang. The scale pins are steel. These knives measure 3 5/16th inches closed. Note that the blade of the knife immediately below has lost probably 50% - 60% of its profile due to sharpening.

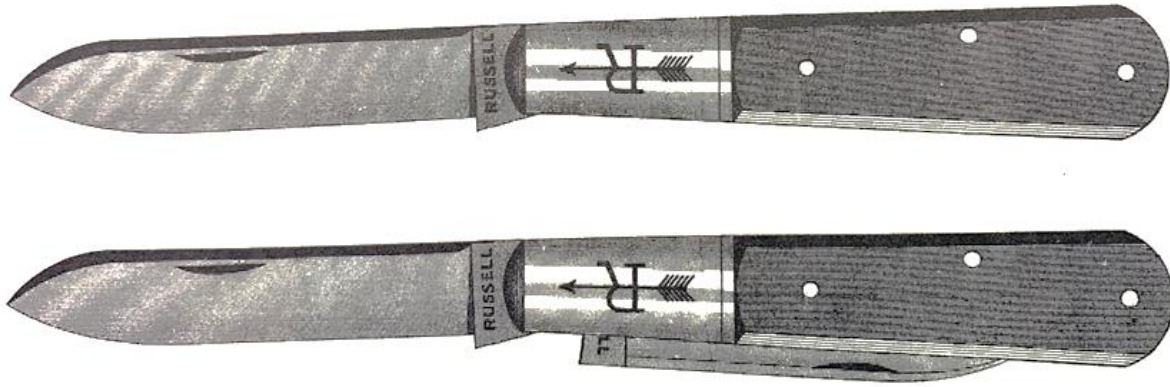


Authors collection

Given the bone scales on the Barlow shown below, I believe this to be one of the very early Barlows by John Russell.



Authors collection

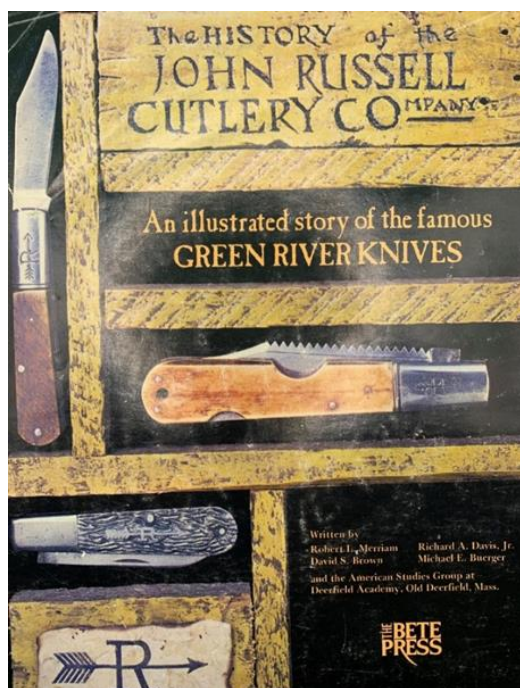


The author's photo above is of a page, in part, from "The History of the John Russell Cutlery Company J. Russell & Co. 1834-84 Green River Works." This picture shows the single blade Barlow with a spear point blade together with a two-blade version²⁷, and they appear to be identical to the examples on the previous page.

An advertisement from 1906 by Wolff *Lane Hardware Co. in Pittsburgh, U.S.A shows the above two Barlow's for sale. Accordingly, this would suggest this pattern of John Russell Barlow's were available for several years. I believe these Barlow's "*may*" even have been made until 1933.



The adjacent illustration is copied from the book "The History of the John Russell Cutlery Company", page 118 - as is illustrated below. This shows another John Russell trademark. This trademark was noted on a John Russell Barlow in an 1895 advertisement for John Russell Barlow's. In distinguishing between a genuine and a replica "John Russell" Barlow according to an article by O. Christopher in "How to tell how old a Barlow knife is by yourself"²⁸ the arrowhead is closer to the top of the bolster itself.




Authors photograph of the front cover of "The History of the John Russell Cutlery Company" which I recommend as compulsory reading for those interested in the history of Barlow's from the American viewpoint which in my view is an important part of the Barlow story. This book is a very important part of my collection.

As an observation, I have noticed a John Russell Barlow for sale where the arrowhead was in the form of a triangle (filled in) whereas the arrowhead on my original John Russell Barlow's and the arrowhead shown on knives in the Barlow history as noted in footnote 15, are as follows: ←. Accordingly, further research will be required to ascertain if that form of arrowhead is genuine.

The illustration following, copied from the Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. 1929 catalogue in the author's collection, shows various John Russell Barlow patterns.

HIBBARD, SPENCER, BARTLETT & CO.
1679

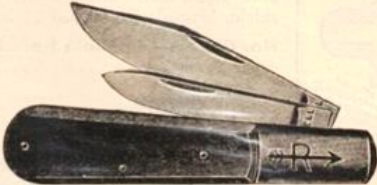
JOHN RUSSELL AND CO.'S BARLOW POCKET KNIVES



Blades are nicely glazed, **brown bone handles**, iron lined, steel bolster stamped with trade-mark, length when closed 3½ in.

No. C60—John Russell, 1 large spear point blade, per dozen\$7.45

No. C62—John Russell, 1 large spear point blade and 1 pen blade.....per dozen \$9.45




Blades are nicely glazed, **brown bone handles**, iron lined, steel bolster stamped with trade-mark, length when closed 3½ in.

No. C66—John Russell, 1 large clip point blade and 1 pen blade.....per dozen \$9.45

No. C65—John Russell, 1 large clip point blade, per dozen\$7.45

ALL ABOVE, HALF DOZEN IN A BOX

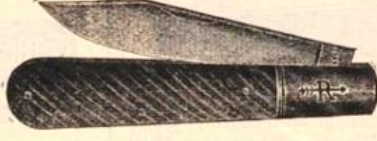
JOHN RUSSELL AND CO.'S DADDY BARLOW POCKET KNIVES



No. C6000—John Russell, Easy Opener, 1 large clip point blade, nicely glazed, **brown bone handle**, iron lined, steel bolster stamped with trade-mark, length when closed 5 in.....per dozen \$15.20

HALF DOZEN IN A BOX

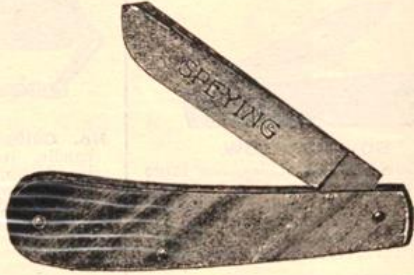
JOHN RUSSELL AND CO.'S DADDY BARLOW POCKET KNIVES



No. C0600—John Russell, 1 large clip point blade, nicely glazed, **brown bone handle**, iron lined, steel bolster stamped with trade-mark, length when closed 5 in.per dozen \$15.20

NICKEL SILVER HANDLE SPEYING KNIVES

Sanitary highest quality, approved shape.

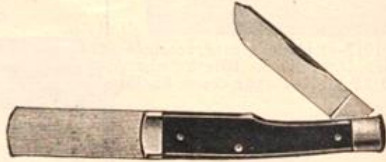


This knife is the result of an ever increasing demand for an item of this kind that can be sterilized by immersing in boiling water without fear of damaging same. The shape is the most approved pattern and fits the hand comfortably.

No. C2909P—Hibbard, 1 large speying blade, nicely glazed, nickel silver handle, length when closed 3½ in., per dozen\$11.10

HALF DOZEN IN A BOX

Hibbard BUDDING KNIFE



No. C2429P—Hibbard Budding, 1 blade highly mirror finished on both sides, black buffalo celluloid handle, with genuine ivory tip for budding and grafting. Brass lined, nickel silver bolsters, length when closed 4½ in.per dozen \$20.00

ALL ABOVE, HALF DOZEN IN A BOX

The plate following shows a Barlow by “Korten Scherf, Solingen, Germany”. The knife measures 3 ¼ inches closed. The scales are white bone with 4 steel pins, the blade is a clip point.

I have not been able to date this example. Bernard Levine shows the firm dates from 1900?²⁹ and provides no other details. Based on the bone scales and steel pins and comparing the scales to the Samuel Barlow knives on page 12 above, I believe this Barlow could date to early 1900. The blade profile would originally have been a clip blade.



Author's collection.



The adjacent plate shows the Korten Scherf trademark. As the trademark dates from 1895³⁰ that would suggest the knife could be even earlier than 1900.

The following knife is a single clip blade Barlow by Taylor Eye Witness. This example has wooden scales, steel pins and measures 3 3/8th inches closed. Based on an advertisement by Southern & Richardson in a Sydney trade catalogue dated 1935, this pattern Barlow would certainly date from that period. However, further research would suggest, given the wooden scales on this pattern, would most likely date earlier to c.1920s.



Photo courtesy of Lawrie Wilson

The plate below is a Barlow by Christopher Johnson & Co, Sheffield, England 1836-c1956. I would date this Barlow to c1930.

The Johnson trademark C.J. in a flag is on the bolster with wooden scales.



Authors collection.

Southern and Richardson two blade Barlow's, top one with with bone scales and steel pins the next photo with Buffalo scales. These knife measures 3 5/16th inches closed. A Southern & Richardson advert in a 1935 trade catalogue by a Sydney firm clearly dates these knives to at least 1935. The knife is marked "Southern & Richardson, Sheffield, England" on the mark side of the Tang.



C1935 Southern and Richardson Barlow's with bone and Buffalo scales.



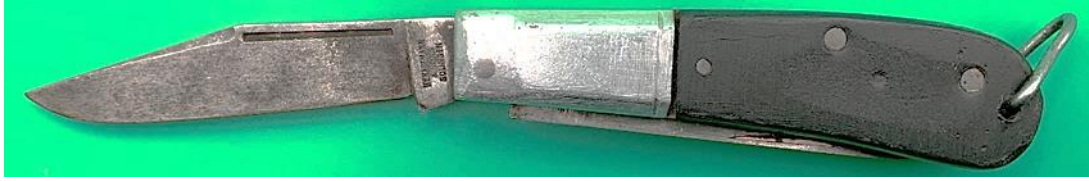
The blade is marked "NEST [bird's nest] KNIFE".

Author's collection.

The following Barlow by "H.Y.Kaufmann & Sons , Solingen", "Made in Germany, K55K" is stamped on the pile side of the tang. This knife has a clip point blade and Spey blade.

The scales appear to be pressed leather with steel pins, the top pin is in the middle of the scales. The shackle on this example is a replacement. The knife measures 3 5/16ths closed.

I have not been able to put an exact date on this Barlow, however, given the steel pins my thinking it would date to c1950 -1960's.



Author's collection.

Following are two further examples of the Barlow by British maker George Wostenholm with the I*X L marking on the bolster.

This plate shows a Barlow with a spear point blade and bone scales and steel pins. This pattern appears to date from the 1920s to the 1930s based on early catalogues. However, research suggests they *may* have been produced up to the 1950s. The knife measures 3 4/16th closed. The mark side of the tang is marked I.X L, George Wostenholm, Sheffield, England. It is assumed that the blade profile originally would have been the same as the second example following.



Author's collection.

The plate below is a two-blade Barlow by George Wostenholm, with bone scales, clip point blade and steel pins. This pattern seems to date from the 1920s to the 1930's, however, as noted above research suggests the knife *may* have been produced up to the 1950s. The knife measures 3 1/4 inches closed. The mark side of the tang is marked I.XL George Wostenholm, Sheffield, England, and I*XL on the bolster.



Author's collection.

A modern version dated c.1990s of a two-blade IXL Wostenholm Barlow.



Author's collection.

Another contributor to the Barlow narrative was Mark Twain in his books “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer 1876” and “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn 1884”. The Barlow knife features in the adventures of both Tom and Huckleberry. As *John Russell Barlow’s* (page 19) had been produced by this time, I believe it is fair to conclude they were mostly likely the Barlow knife referred to by Twain.

Quotes in part from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*³¹ (grammar and spelling as quoted in the book). *“We got an old tin lantern, and a butcher knife without any handle, and a brand-new Barlow knife worth two bits in any store.”*

“There was empty dry goods boxes under the awnings, and loafers roosting on them all day long, whittling them with their Barlow knives”.

Quotes in part from “The adventures of Tom Sawyer” (grammar and spelling as quoted in the book). *“Mary gave him a brand -new “Barlow” knife, worth twelve and a half cents; and the convulsion of delight that swept his system shook him to his foundations. True, the knife would not cut anything, but it was a sure-enough “Barlow.”*³²

Another Barlow c.1920 is by C.F.Wolfertz & Co, Allentown, P.A. This knife has bone scales and a spear point blade with smaller pen blade. If I read Bernard Levine correctly this blade is described as a “cut swage with French nail mark (long pull)”³³. C.F. Wolfertz was a manufacturer of knives 1862-1920 when they became a wholesaler until 1944. Therefore, this knife may well date to 1944 if we assume Wolfertz continued to make knives but only sold them as a wholesaler not a retailer? The knife measures 3 5/16th inches closed.

The fact that the pins are brass not steel suggests to me c1940-44. Once again, we notice that the top pin is not centered.



Author’s collection.

According to some sources the Barlow knife was the most produced knife pattern over the last 100 years or so, compared to any other style of pocketknife.

Whilst the original knives, as stated, were very basic, over recent years they have become better finished with 440 Stainless Steel blades (compared to carbon steel), which are highly polished, and the scale materials have become more varied and better finished.

The plates below show modern variants of the “original” two blade Barlow, 1960 to the present.



Author's collection.

Details of the above Barlow knives – from top to bottom:

The first is a two-blade pattern which is the same as the original basic design except the scales are Saw Cut Delrin compared to bone or wood. This knife dates from 1960. The Barlow trademark is on the bolster. The knife measures 3 1/4 inches closed.

The second example is a current pattern, 2022, by American firm Rough Rider. It has stag horn scales and 440 Stainless Steel blades which are highly polished. The Rough Rider trademark is on scales which can vary depending on the date of the knife. The knife measures 3 1/4 inches closed.

The third Barlow is also a current pattern, 2020, by Rough Rider, again with 440 Stainless Steel and polished blades with this knife having composite scales. This example has their horseshoe trademark on the bolster. The knife measures 3 1/4 inches closed.

Another example of a two blade Barlow dating from 1960 is by "*Imperial, Provenance, Rhode Island U.S.A*". The scales are Delrin. The blade is marked "Diamond Edge 853DE". The knife measures 3 5/16th inches closed. Collectors should note this Barlow only has two brass pins.



Author's collection.

The plate below is a standard two blade Barlow pattern by Colonial Cutlery, Provenance, Rhode Island U.S.A C1950-60. The faux bone scales appear to be some form of composite material or maybe plastic?



Author's collection.

As with most of the Barlow story, exact dates have been debated, as is the case with the introduction of the Granddaddy Barlow or Daddy Barlow. It seems from what I can ascertain that the Granddaddy Barlow was first produced in the late 1800s to early 1900. This pattern is 5 inches closed with a 4-inch clip point blade. The scale material varies between the different manufacturers.

The following plates are examples of Granddaddy Barlow's.

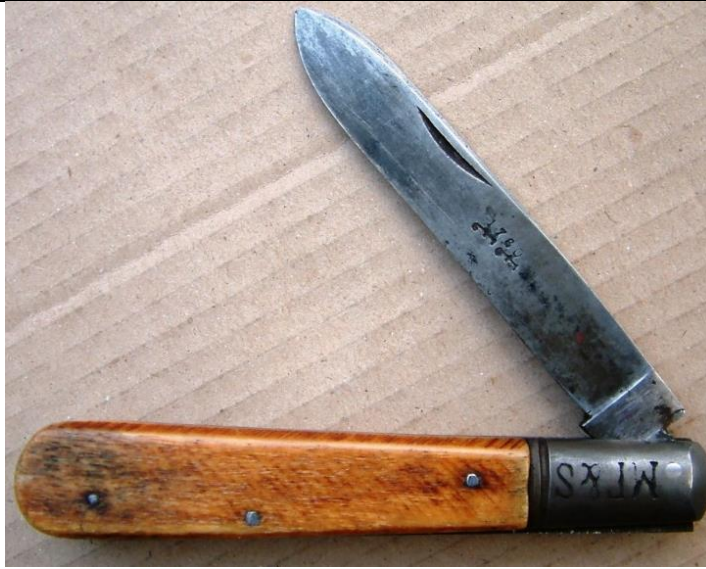


The adjacent illustration is copied from a page of a Hibbard, Spencer & Barlett 1929 trade catalogue which is in my collection. What is of interest is the Daddy Barlow is the easy opener pattern which is also the style used on British boy scout knives advertised in the Edments Cash Stores of Melbourne, Catalogue of 1927

The plates shown above are Daddy Barlow's by Mathew Furness and Son c1900.



Dyson collection.



Dyson collection.

The following plate is a “Master Barlow” by Colonial Cutlery in Provenance, Rhode Island, U.S.A. Notwithstanding several attempts to contact the manufacturer, I have not been able to date this example. My research would “suggest” the knife would date to c1950-1960. Master Barlow (Granddaddy) by Colonial, Prov. U.S.A.



Author’s collection.

The following plate is a Case Granddaddy Barlow c.1970.



Author’s collection.

The plate below is Granddaddy Barlow by Rough Rider, again a modern variant of the pattern introduced c.1900.



Author’s collection.

Modern Barlow Knives with the Barlow trademark, generally on the bolster, or using their own trademarks such as Rough Rider and Case to name a few are made in England, America, Japan, Germany, and China.

How to tell an "Original" from "New" Barlow's

As Barlow knives have been around for some 354 years and with many manufacturers using the Barlow trademark or style, telling the old from the new is one of the challenges facing a collector.

Original Barlow.

One source I have read suggests the location of the centre pin is one way to tell if the Barlow is an early Barlow based on the original compared to the location of the centre pin on a "Replica. The centre pin on a replica Barlow is closer to the bolster and made of brass whereas the centre pin on the originals is the middle of the scales and made of steel³⁴.

The suggestion that the centre pin on an original is in the *middle* of the scale, I do not believe holds true in all cases. The original (early) Barlow's I have studied do have steel pins.

If you have a close look at the "*Original Samuel Barlow's*" above, there is no one Centre pin. There are two steel top pins with two steel end pins.

The "*Original Furness*" knife only has three steel pins, and the top pin is NOT centred.

As always there are exceptions to the rule. The "*John Russell*" Barlow c1875-1884 only has three steel pins with the top pin centred.

The examples of Southern and Richardson and Taylor Eye Witness Barlow's shown above have steel pins with the top pin located in the centre.

Barlow replicas

The Centre pin is not in the middle of the scale, usually closer to the Bolster and made of brass. *The example below is from 1960.* This knife measures 3 4/16ths closed. Marked Japan on the mark side of the tang and the pins are brass with the centre located closer to the bolster.



Author's collection.



Author's collection.

The top Barlow is a two blade Barlow and dates to the 1960s. It is made in Japan. Note the brass pins and position of the centre pin. This knife measures 3 1/4 inches closed. The bottom Barlow is a two blade Barlow c.1875 -1884 by John Russell. Note the Steel pins and the centre pin. This knife measures 3 5/16th inches closed.

A note for collectors, Delrin started to be used around early 1960. Hence this is another way of assessing the age of Barlow knives.

Commemorative Barlow's.

Commemorative Barlow's are made to replicate the original. The only way to tell them apart from an original is by the wear and tear and patina.

General comments comparing the original to a replica Barlow.

Some of the other factors to look for are:

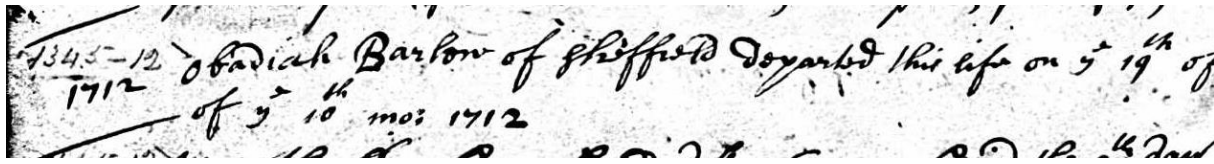
- Are the blades made of Carbon Steel or Stainless Steel. The more modern Barlow's are stainless steel which are very highly polished.
- The scale material with the modern Barlow's varies from saw cut Delrin to Stag Horn and a Composite material whereas the originals seem to be bone, horn or wooden.
- Tang and bolster markings are also important, and this is where collectors need to do their research to get a handle on the various markings of the period.

Finally, whilst stating the obvious, look at the patina of the knife and any old catalogues to try and verify the age of the knife.

CONCLUSION TO THE BARLOW NARRATIVE

In my mind, the question of assessing who can claim the right to use the term original or 1st generation Barlow may come down to a legal academic argument. Obadiah Barlow has generally been credited as being the cutler who first produced the Barlow knife c1670, with the firm ceasing upon the death of John Barlow Jnr. in April 1799. Their knives carried

the name "Bar/low" by itself from the outset c1670. Obadiah Barlow died 19th October 1712.



Records from England & Wales Quaker Birth, Marriage, and death Registers 1578-1837

Yorkshire> Piece 1376: Monthly Meeting of Balby (Sheffield, Doncaster) (1646-1729, 1646-1729)

Samuel Barlow also produced the "Barlow" style knife using his trademark "Sideways Z and scimitar from c1725 and from 1798 he added the word "Barlow" to his trademark. The Furness family produced the same "style" Barlow using their own trademarks from c1760 "Furness" on the blade and their respective initials on the tang. From the various court cases in the 1800's several cutlers attempted to claim the right to use the term "Original Barlow."

In terms of the American story, we can reasonably conclude that John Russell can claim that he was the first to *mass produce* the 1st generation or original style Barlow in America in 1875. If my interpretation of a few articles is correct, some Americans see the John Russell Barlow's as the "Original American Barlow."

What I have found interesting is the description by Levine in his summary of Pocketknife manufacturers as follows: *Russell, J(John) & Co. Trademark or Ref, Green River Works, R/Arrow, made pocketknives 1875-1917, 1920-1941. "reproduction" Barlow's.*³⁵

The question is, how does one define the Barlow's made by other makers, be it England, Germany, Japan, America or wherever? Some use the trademark "Barlow" such as some knife makers in Japan and USA (Colonial Cutlery, Rhode Island) others use their own respective trademarks e.g., Rough Rider, Case to name a couple of the current makers of the Barlow Style pocketknife.

My view is there can be only "one" original Barlow [1st Generation] and that seems to be "Obadiah Barlow". All other Barlow style pocketknives can be classed as replicas or copies of the original. Hence my interest in Levine's wording.

In the end it may come down to the Lawyers to answer this question. If we consider the case 9 May 1840 when "Samuel Barlow" sort compensation from Luke Oakes for using the trademark "Z" and Falchion and claiming them to be the "original Barlow" in his advertising and it was Henry Barlow Mills who put the case in 1886, that it was his family who was issued the trademark in 1720. [1725].

We know from an advertisement Henry Barlow Mills had in 1859 in the “Melville Co Commercial Directory of Sheffield Rotherham and Neighbourhood” (my representation of which is shown below) that “Samuel Barlow “used the term “THE OLD ORIGINAL BARLOW’S KNIVES” which in fact, to my mind may be regarded as a misuse of the term “Original Barlow” he charged Luke Oates with, reported on 9 May 1840.

John Barlow Jnr, from the Obadiah Barlow family, was not issued his “official” trademark until 1745, “*late 18th Century Sheffield Cutlers’ Marks*” “*Barlow John, Campo-lane.*”³⁶ However, according to Bernard Levine, Obadiah Barlow knives carried the Barlow name from the outset in c1670.³⁷ Accordingly, does the use of a trademark on a knife from c1670, although not registered until 1745 or a trademark officially registered in 1725 and 1798 authenticate the claim to be “THE ORIGINAL OLD BARLOW KNIVES” as detailed in the following advertisement?

THE OLD ORIGINAL
BARLOW KNIVES,
MANUFACTURED ONLY BY
SAMUEL BARLOW.
WORKS, -
NEEPSSEND, NEAR SHEFFIELD,
HENRY MILLS, Successor.
None are genuine unless stamped upon with the Blade, with
The Corporate Mark, thus: - (Scimitar and sideways Z)

The advertisement shown above is my representation of an original advertisement in the 1859 “*Melville Co Commercial Directory of Sheffield Rotherham and Neighbourhood*”.

The whole premise of the court case 9 May 1840 and subsequent cases was that Samuel Barlow had the legal claim to use the term “Original” Barlow.” I would argue the court should have questioned that premise from the start. I would further argue that the use of the name Barlow by itself on Obadiah Barlow knives from C1670 until 1745 [when registered] would have been justification alone to claim the legal right to refer to their knives as “*original*” before the name was registered. Having said that, John Barlow Jnr had passed. The firm had ceased to exist, hence there was no one to argue that case.

My opening remarks clearly state that in the court case reported on 3 February 1864 it is the inventors name “Barlow” as in Samuel Barlow or Obadiah Barlow which gives the name Barlow to that pattern knife. In conclusion, I would argue the legal right to use the term “Original Barlow knife” rests with Obadiah Barlow.

Never too late to have that legal argument.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

As a collector I had been searching for early Sheffield Barlow's by Samuel Barlow etc. (1700s, early 1800s) for some years. *Whilst only by word of mouth*, I have heard from sources in America that *originals (English)* are hard to come by since the Barlow knives were well used and very often rather than throw them out, the parts were used for other purposes or even repaired. Given that many early colonists were farmers, trappers and the like, the reason given for their apparent rarity may have some merit.



Authors collection

The Barlow's, top knife c1908 by Emil Schlemper & Co of Germany and a John Russell C1873-1884 show well-worn blades which may further support the view that the Barlow become an important part of colonial life and hence were well and truly used to the full.

Notwithstanding the worn blade on the Barlow by Schlemper, it has now become one of my everyday carries and keeps a remarkably sharp blade.

I have endeavored to use reliable references to write this brief overview of the history of Barlow Knives.

As stated, I have not had an example of the knife made by Obadiah, John and John Barlow Jnr to study which in some ways has made writing this monograph difficult.

I would like to quote Dennis Smith again. In his paper the "Old Original Barlow's," Smith states that many firms including Richard's (c1930-1977) mass produced a Barlow knife of a type which once sold in toy shops.

The photo shown overleaf is a Richard's type Barlow from my collection.



Richard's c1950s/60s Barlow pattern pocketknife.

In my opinion, Smith sums up the Barlow story when he states, *"The writer [Smith] has seen Irish and Japanese pocketknives marked "Barlow." One suspects that the shades of Henry Mills, manufacturer of the Old Original Barlow Knives would rise indignantly from their graves."*³⁸

However, this assumes we accept "Mills" was the inventor of the "old original Barlow" knife. [author's comment]

In conclusion to the Barlow story, Obadiah Barlow or Henry Mills may even be taking another view from their graves *"Our Barlow's have stood the test of time and become an icon" as the Barlow is now used as an advertising tool and collector's item such as the Barlow shown below by Remington Rifles and using the old western figures or other images to promote their rifles.*



Authors collection

I must close with the term "E & OE" - see Footnote¹.

¹.E & OE "Errors and Omissions Excepted".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank friends Lawrie Wilson, proprietor of CASK (Collectable Antique Sheffield Knives) Web page: www.CASK.info, Paul Stamp and Martin Cook both collectors and authors in the UK for assisting me by providing reliable sources of information on the history of the Barlow knife and photos of Barlow knives from their collections.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Michael Dyson for his willingness to share with me his vast knowledge on the subject and to allow me to use photos and information from his collection. Without Michael's help I do not believe we would be getting "somewhere" nearer to the true history of what we refer to as the Barlow knife today.

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