

# Pompeii Scabbards

## (Some Reconstructions)

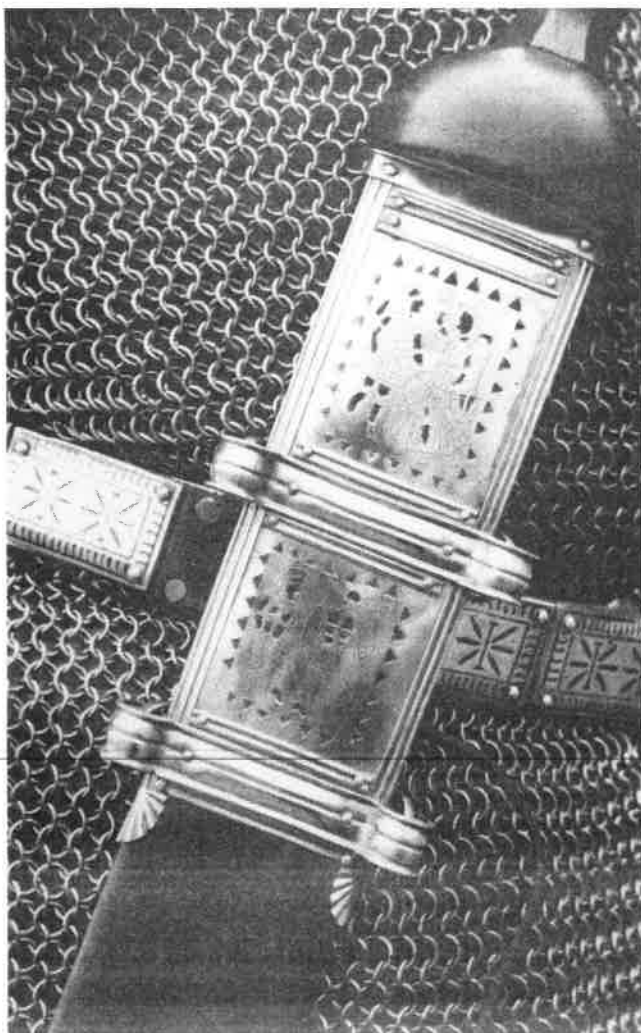
Martin White

This article, its findings, and the questions raised is the result of the need to find a simple scabbard design of the Pompeii type as defined by 'Ulbert', which would be easy to manufacture, to replace the aging and unfortunately incorrect scabbards which were still in use within the Guard.

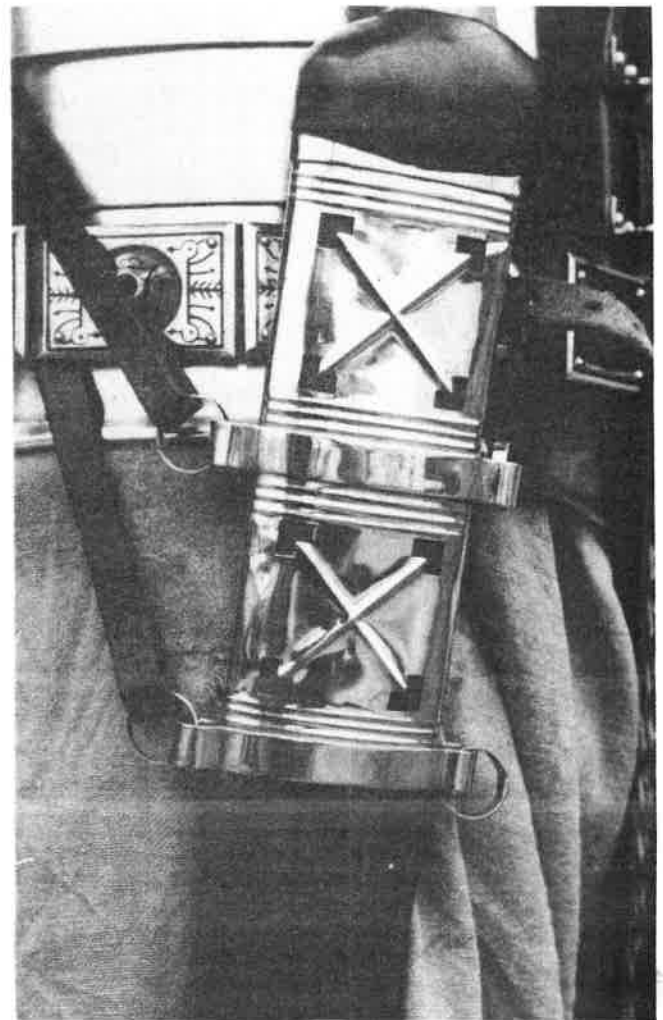
Up to this time, two Pompeii type scabbards had been reconstructed:

- The highly decorative two plate type found at Pompei (which gives this type its name) and one found in Holland which is a single large plate divided by the upper hanger (see fig. I)
- The other type is taken from Simkins' reconstruction of the Long Windsor (Great Windsor) find, which he called 'simplified Pompeii'. See fig. II

The evidence for the Long Windsor find will be looked at later.



**Fig. I Pompeii type from Holland**  
(Photo E.S.G.)



**Fig. II Pompeii (Simkins' 'simplified')**  
(E.S.G.)

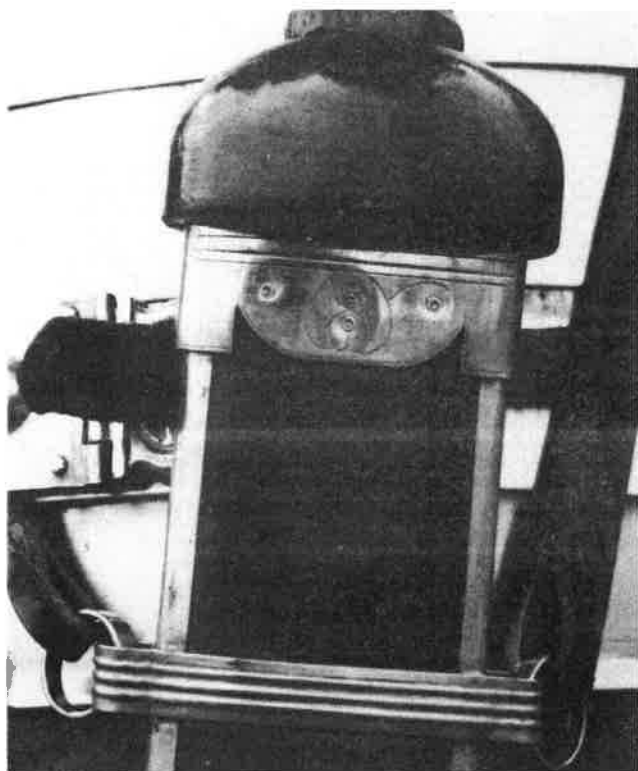
I have used the evidence available to me in the reconstructions under discussion and although extensive, I am sure it is not complete. Hopefully, through this report perhaps more information will come to light.

Before any reconstructions were started, drawings and details were sent to Ralph Jackson at the British Museum, Nick Griffiths, formally artist at the Ashmolean and Marijke Brouwer at the Rijs Museum in Leiden. It was on their approval that the reconstructions commenced.

In 1994 after writing to many museums, both British and European, it became evident that there was a large selection of Mainz type scabbards (late 1st BC/Early 1st AD) but suprisingly few examples of the Pompeii type other than those mentioned above.

What I was looking for came to light in an article by Brailsford, 1962. This described a collection of Military bronze fittings from Hod Hill in Dorset. One piece was a scabbard mount associated with Crown Hilt Guards (Brailsford A5), usually a native decoration.

The other article of bronze was, as far as I can tell, not described. (Brailsford A7) It is a band some 12mm wide and a length suitable to wrap around a scabbard. It is decorated in a simple manner, a series of ovals between two lines, the decoration being punched. Neither piece has any evidence of tinning. In these and cases from other Roman Forts they have been attached to Roman equipment. (see Figs. III and IV.)



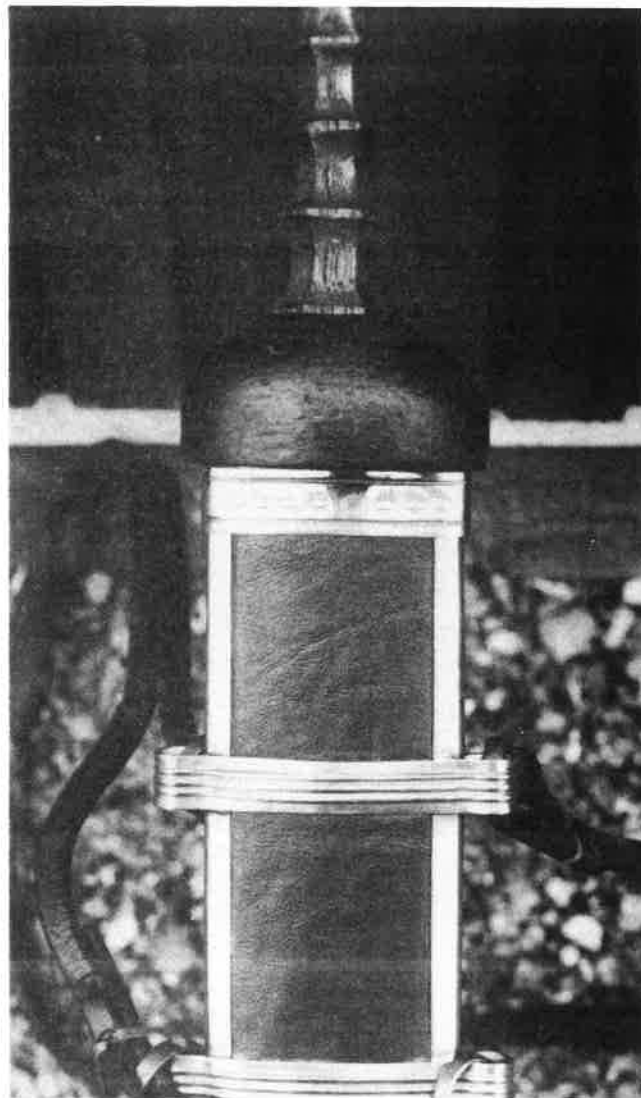
**Fig. III** Hod Hill 'Crown guard' fitting  
(E.S.G.)

It is accepted that 'natifying' of Roman equipment is quite common in the 1st Century, particularly in the first half when standardisation had not proceeded too far.

The addition of these simple decorated pieces to a Roman scabbard raises the question how simple was the scabbard that was issued?

This 'issue' scabbard was ultimately the very scabbard that I started looking for! (See fig.V). It was to be two years before I was able to reconstruct this scabbard; events were about to take me in a different direction!

In 1995 the Guard travelled to Holland and visited the RMO in Leiden. There in a display case was a bronze scabbard fitting from the Roman fort at Valkenburg. Dated to the end of 1st Century AD (see fig. VI).



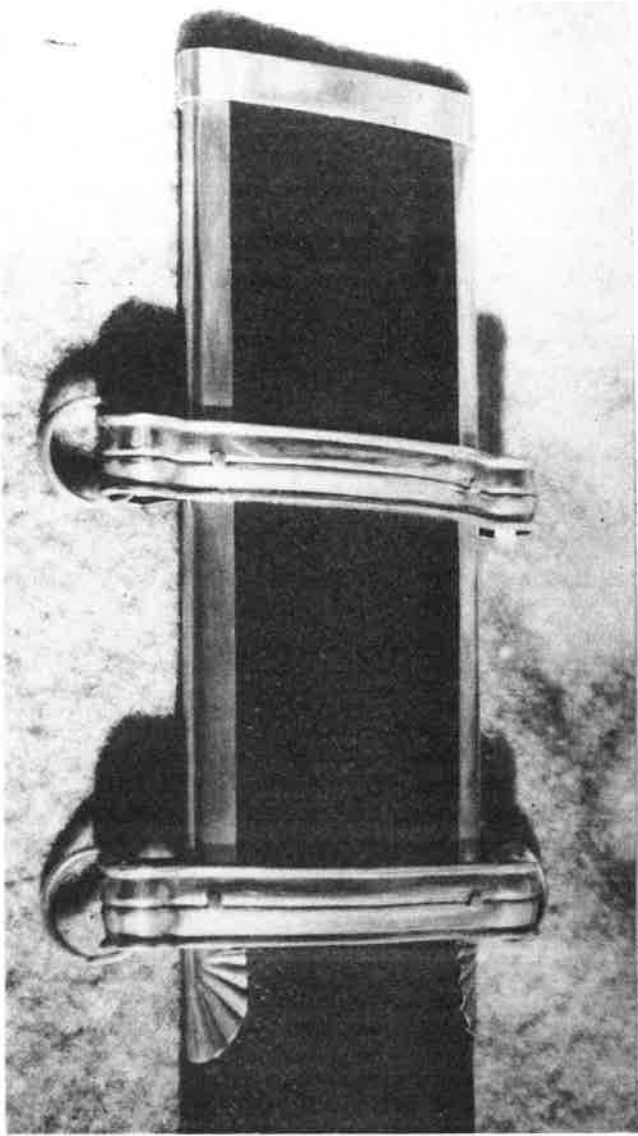
**Fig. IV** Hod Hill 'Thin band' fitting  
(E.S.G.)

The plate wraps round at the sides and has a retaining band at the back, one end of which has a rivet, the other end being soldered. The whole piece is tinned. (See fig. VIII).

The decoration consists of a scribed circle with a cut-out eight leaved design within, with four right-angled cut outs in the corners. Radiating from the circle are six inscribed lines, one to each corner, one to the top and one to the bottom, each ending in three small punched circles. Three scribed lines run across the plate above and below the cut outs and below the lower cross lines is a scalloped design.

The unusual thing about the piece is the elongated 'legs' which continue below the decoration. The length of these 'legs', if fitted under the first cross hanger, conforms to the standard dimensions of approx. 75mm from the mouth of the scabbard to the first hanger. (See fig. VI and the cover illustration).

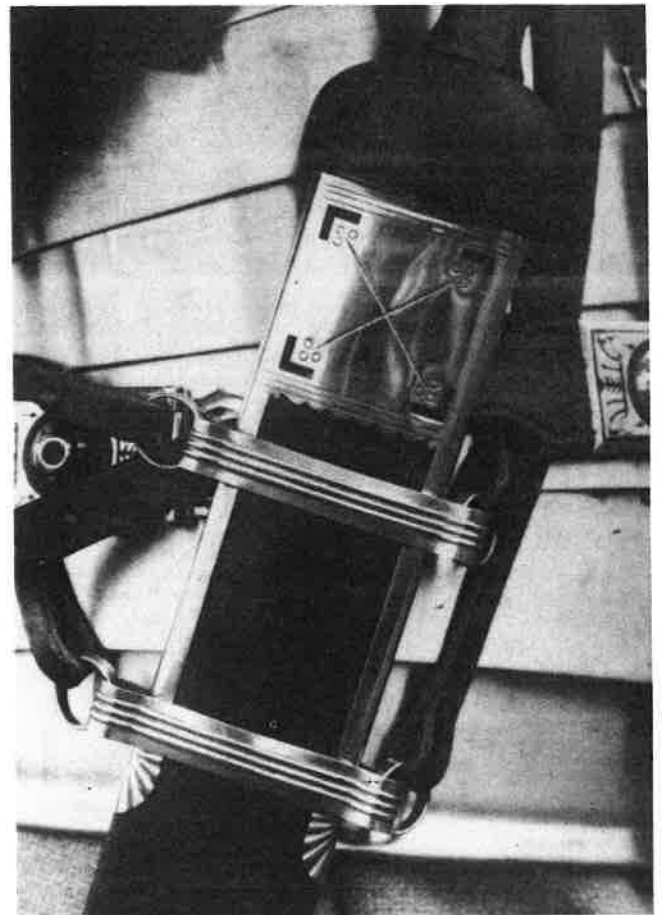
I was immediately aware of the similarities between this piece from Holland and the find from Long Windsor from which Simkins made his reconstruction (fig. II).



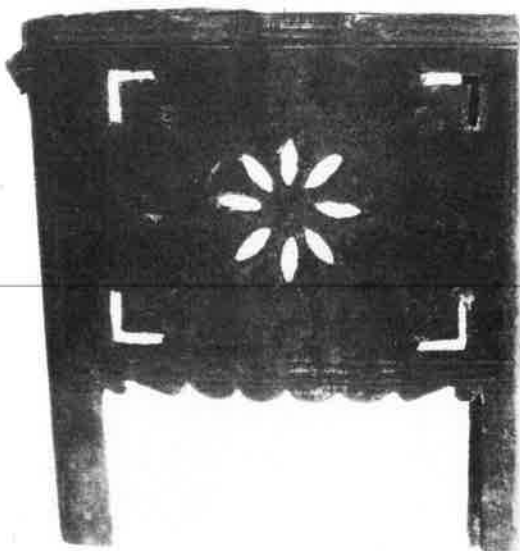
**Fig. V Pompeii 'Issue' scabbard**  
(E.S.G.)



**Fig. VII. Valkenburg scabbard mount (rear)**  
(R.M.O.)



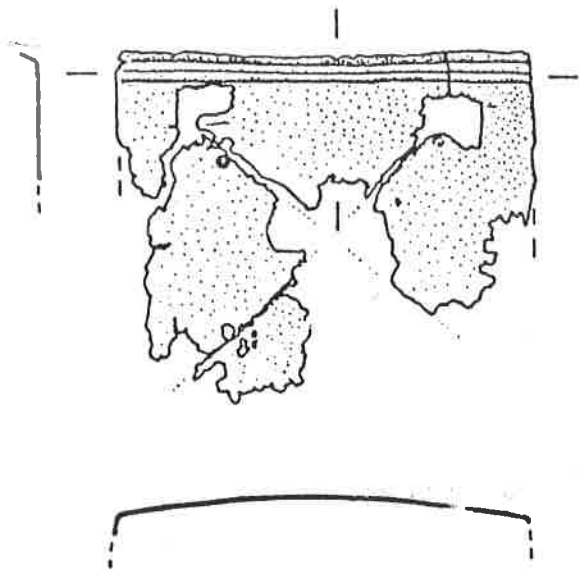
**Fig. VIII Long Windsor reconstruction. Top plate.**  
(E.S.G.)



**Fig. VI. Valkenburg scabbard mount (front)**  
(R.M.O.)

The Long Windsor example also has the right angle cut outs, three inscribed lines above and below them and four inscribed lines radiating from the centre to the corners, also ending in three punched circles.

The centre is badly corroded and although it would have been nice to be able to fit a circle of cutouts in the centre as in the Valkenburg piece, it does not work. In view of this it can be assumed the inscribed lines form a cross at the centre. (See fig. VIII and IX).



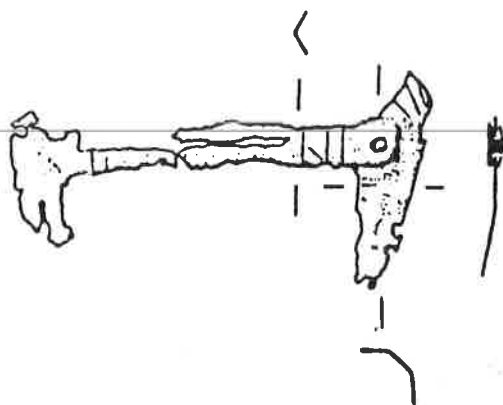
**Fig. IX Long Windsor scabbard mount**  
(Griffiths)

There is enough of the plate surviving to show that the edges go around the back. It was also tinned. These details are so close to the Valkenburg example that it is possible it came from the same workshop. With that in mind, I added the rearing features of the Valkenburg piece to the Long Windsor, i.e. extended legs and scalloping at the bottom. Areas of the Chape also survived in the long Windsor find. (fig X and XI).

In all cases the scabbards were reconstructed with the traditional palmettes and known hangers.

Drawings of this revised reconstruction were sent to Lieden, the British Museum and Nick Griffiths who made the drawings of the original find when he worked at the Ashmolean.

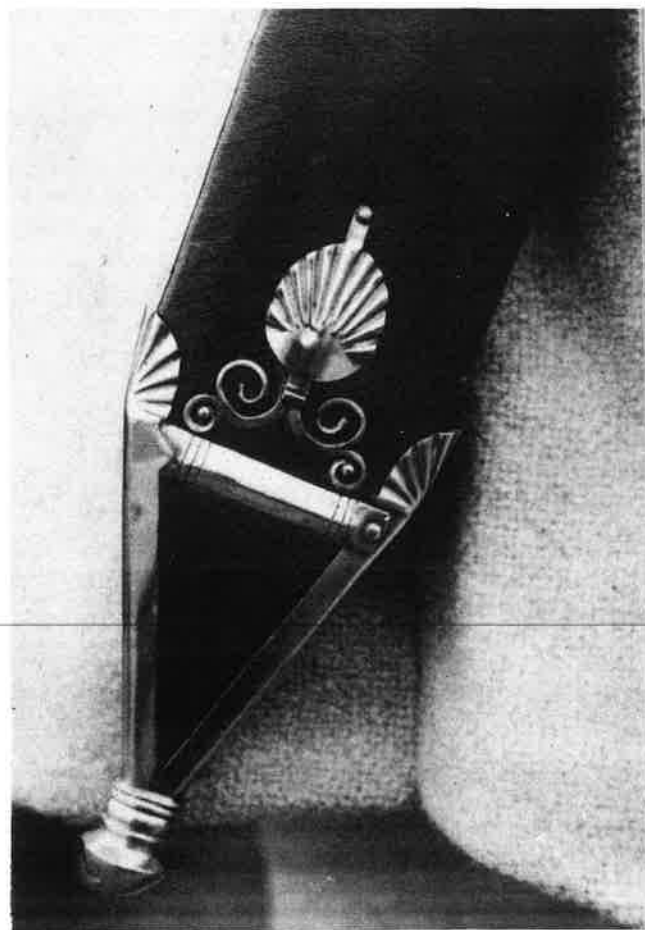
All agreed that the pieces from Volkenburg and Long Windsor had so many details in common that the reconstruction was quite acceptable and agreed that it could have come from the same source.



**Fig. X Long Windsor Chape**  
(Griffiths)

It may be interesting to consider a point that a Batavian Cohort is known to have been in Britain during the invasion of 43AD, and in 69AD a Batavian Cohort is known to have been in residence at Valkenburg. Is it the same Unit transferred to Holland because of the Civil War of 69AD, or did the Long Windsor example belong to a Batavian Auxiliary?

The last point, and one that may cause most debate, is one of fashion. By the end of the 1st Century BC the Mainz type scabbards have become very ornate, and although they continue into the 1st Century AD they are replaced by the simpler Pompeii sword and scabbard, possibly because of the loss of the Varan Legions in 6AD with all equipment. Recent finds from the site of the battle prove that some equipment is being used earlier than previously thought, for example, a piece of Lorica Segmentata albeit a crude example, was in use at that date. At any rate, the troops in Britain in AD43-50 are adding simple decorations to their scabbards. Another point which may show an earlier date for the introduction of the Pompeii pattern sword is the lack of evidence in Britain for the Mainz type. The Fulham Sword is unique in Britain, which may or not indicate that the four Legions and Auxiliaries (which came from the Rhine Garrison) already had the Pompeii pattern sword and scabbards. The Hod Hill example already shows the legs (a native feature) which when extended would form the Valkenburg/Long Windsor type ultimately going on to the double or extended single decorated plate of the Pompeii finds up to 79AD.



**Fig. XI Long Windsor reconstruction. Chape.**  
(E.S.G.)

The Ermine Street Guard uses all five of the designs described, and regards, as do the experts who have been involved, that the new reconstruction of the Long Windsor find is a far more likely representation of the evidence than previously published.

Any comments or criticisms concerning this article would be welcome.

I would like to thank Ralph Jackson of the British Museum, Nick Griffiths and Marijke Brouwer of the Rijks Museum van Oudheden for their help and patience.



## ‘Liquid Refreshment in Roman York’

*Graham Sumner*

Customers at the Roman Bath public house in York were once able to view the remains of the fortress baths through a glass floor, although for many years this has not been possible. Now once again the remains have been opened up for public inspection, not at a distance as before but at closer quarters by means of a staircase and viewing platform.

The ruins, now incorporated beneath the recently refurbished public house, were originally excavated in 1930. They are one of the few visible relics of the legionary fortress of Eboracum. Re-used building

material including inscriptions from the VIth legion perhaps indicate the bath house had been rebuilt on the site of an earlier structure.

Parts of a Frigidarium wall and Caldarium were uncovered. The apse in the Caldarium will be familiar to Guard members who saw the rebuilt examples at the Archeon and Xanten. Indeed Xanten baths feature in the video, shown as part of the small exhibition which now accompanies the remains.

The Roman Bath public house provides a welcome halt during any tour of Roman York.