

# Needlework Tools

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# Kit Lists

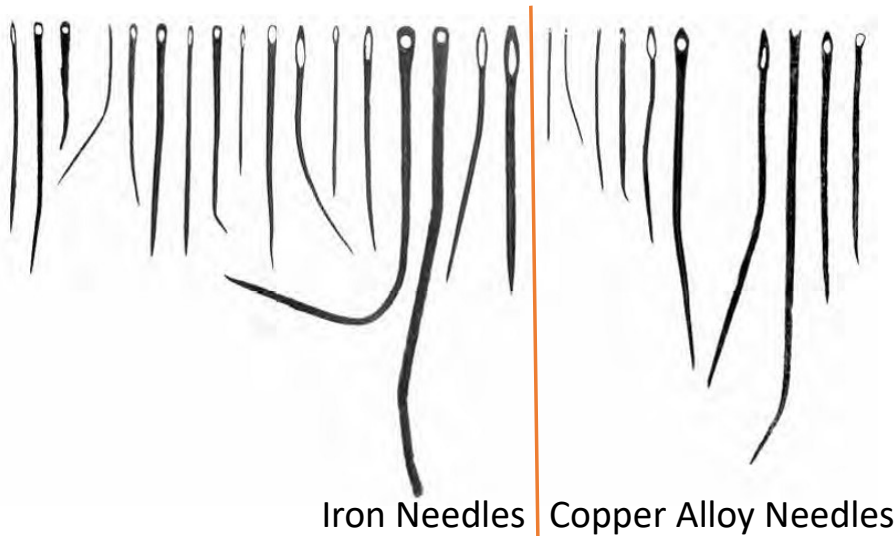
## Sewing

- Needles
- Whetstone
- Pins
- Thread
- Wax
- Thimble
- Snips
- Shears
- Chalk
- Tape Measure
- Awl
- Container
- Needle Threader

## Embroidery

- Needles
- Floss
- Snips
- Container
- Frames
- Stand
- Whetstone
- Needle Threader
- Needle Puller
- Needle Minder
- Stitch layer
- Finger protection
- Wax
- Cat

# NEEDLES



Coppergate Finds, "The Small Finds" pg 1782



Threave Castle in Kirkcudbrightshire  
Bronze, 14 or 15<sup>th</sup> century

- Made of iron, copper alloy or bone
- Two types of eyes:
  - Split and soldered
  - Punched (drilled for bone)
- Earlier needles -
  - More often iron
  - Eye types are equally distributed
- Later needles -
  - More often copper alloy
  - Eye is more often punched
  - Bone is not found

# STORING AND CARING FOR NEEDLES



Bronze Needle case  
Birka grave



Pewter Needle case  
Museum of London



Copper Alloy needle case  
VAM (credit Fleurty Herald)

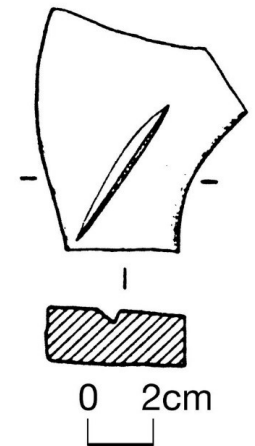


Wooden needle case  
VAM (credit Fleurty Herald)

## Needlecases:

- Norse used copper alloy or bone
- Middle years used copper alloy or pewter
- Later years included wood

- Sharpening tools are required
- Cleaning cloth to keep tarnish at bay



Needle sharpening whetstone  
12-13<sup>th</sup> century, British Museum

# PINS

- Metal pins are common finds
- Used for clothing attachments for sure
- Used for sewing purposes, probably
- Need to be stored and cared for just as needles



Brass coil-headed pins  
16<sup>th</sup> century, credit <https://rosaliegilbert.com/>



Threave Castle in Kirkcudbrightshire  
Bronze, 14 or 15<sup>th</sup> century

# THREAD



Three bone spools/bobbins 15<sup>th</sup> century  
Museum of London

Bobbins can bring your kit to the next level

- Norse people liked flat reels, in bone and wood
- Middling periods used bone and wood spindle like reels
- Later period liked to combine the thread spools and needles cases



Bone thread reel  
Birka grave



Wooden bobbins  
VAM (credit Fleurty Herald)

- Linen thread needs to be waxed.
- Embroidery floss ends benefit from conditioner or wax

# THIMBLES

Two Bronze Spanish thimbles  
VAM



12-13<sup>th</sup> century

10-13<sup>th</sup> century

Shapes include:

- Domes
- “Thimble shaped”
- Ring



Russian 14th c copper alloy thimble  
Novgorod museum  
Credit: Fleurty Herald

- Most commonly made from bronze,
  - cast and sheet are equally represented
- Iron exists as well
- Embroidery doesn't mix with thimbles, instead, use modern adhesive finger protectos



Ring style thimbles found on the Mary Rose  
VAM (credit Fleurty Herald)

# SNIPS & SCISSORS

- Shears, snips and scissors have been found in all areas in all ages
- Most often made of iron, only occasionally silver.
- Often had a case of some sort
- Two types: Spring and pivot
- Shape hasn't changed much over the centuries



Silver embroidery scissors,  
16<sup>th</sup> century National Trust Collection



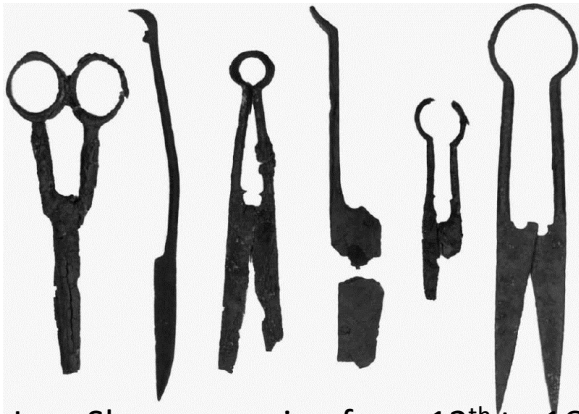
Italian scissors, with case  
16<sup>th</sup> century VAM



Detail from "St-Jerome in his study"  
15<sup>th</sup> century



16<sup>th</sup> century German  
Illumination of tailor scissors



Iron Shears, ranging from 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century  
Coppergate Finds, "Medieval Finds from York" pg 2750



Modern embroidery scissors



# OTHER SEWING TOOLS



Paintings of tailors include

- Chalk
- Flexible measuring tapes
- Rigid rulers
- Awls
- Compasses
- Knives

# EMBROIDERY FRAMES AND STANDS



- Slate frames on trestles
- Fabric tensioned
- Cat is required

# CONTAINING IT ALL

- Sewing tools are shown in open baskets
- Bent-wood boxes appear in illuminations, often in women's bed chambers
- Covered baskets existed



15<sup>th</sup> century Italian painted box  
MET Museum

# MODERN EMBROIDERY GOODIES



Needle threaders



Needle Puller



Needle Minders



Stitch Layer

# RESOURCES

- <https://aardvarchaeology.wordpress.com/2008/05/23/birka-graves-online/>
- <https://fleurtyherald.wordpress.com/2017/12/26/sewing-kit/amp/>
- <https://rosaliegilbert.com/sewingtools.html>
- <https://hausbuecher.nuernberg.de/index.php?do=page&mo=2>
- Finds from Medieval York by Patrick Ottaway
- Textile Production at 16-22 Coppergate by Walton Rogers
- Archaeology of York: The Small Finds v.17 (Vol 17) by Justine Bayley