

How Many Blades?

Additional blades had been added on a number of occasions over the years to often commemorate specific events. Initially this was done by Walter Scale, a retired pen knife cutler from Joseph Rodgers. The final blade was added by Stan Shaw in 2000 to commemorate the Millennium.

Ken Hawley undertook a major clean of the knife in 2010 prior to placing the knife on exhibition in the gallery with support from Stan Shaw. During that clean an analysis of its structure was made and a detailed count of the blades was made. It was discovered that the knife had 2,071 blades!

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Joseph Rodgers showroom at 6 Norfolk Street—the Year Knife is shown on the counter in the left of the picture

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The Legacy

The knife was gifted in 2023 to the Ken Hawley Collection Trust by Stanley Black & Decker to ensure its keeping in perpetuity for the people of Sheffield and to celebrate the 200th anniversary of its original creation by Joseph Rodgers and Sons.



The exceptional quality of the craft skills in building up the knife over the last 200 years serves as a potent symbol of how Sheffield's reputation for high quality products continues to this day.

It was Ken Hawley's determination the knife should stay in the city that should be recognised. The skills of the likes of Walter Scale, Stan Shaw and many others are embedded in the legacy of this complex and beautiful object.

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Joseph Rodgers' Year Knife 1822—2022

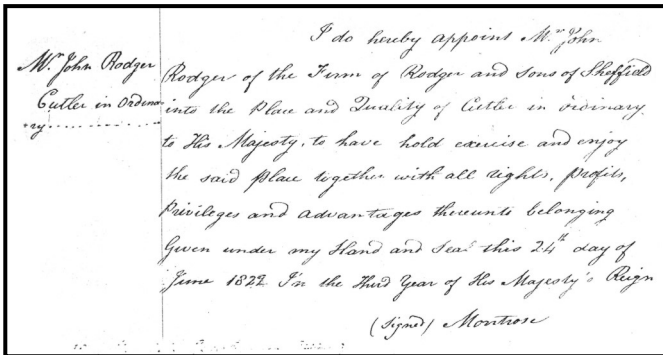


Joseph Rodgers & Sons Ltd

In the nineteenth century, Rodgers had an unsurpassed reputation and a history that was said to have been synonymous with the cutlery trade itself. In 1724, a 'house workshop' was rented to John Rodgers (1701-1785) for seven guineas (7.35) a year, at Holy (or Hawley) Croft, a backstreet off Campo Lane, near the present Cathedral. In 1724, the Company of Cutlers 'let' a mark to John Rodgers – a Star and Maltese Cross (originally registered to another cutler in 1682) – which the family was to make world famous. The mark was confirmed in 1764.



Following an introduction to King George IV in 1821, Rodgers was awarded its first Royal Warrant the following year.



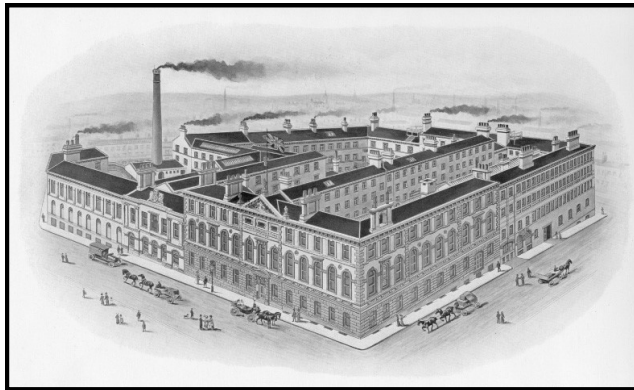
The exhibition knife which came to be known as the Year Knife, was made in 1821-22, probably for the opening of their Norfolk Street showroom which was established around that time.

The Year Knife

There is no evidence to suggest that when it was created additional blades would be added.

The structure of the knife is based on 'cubes' of springs and blades, a system which seems to have been developed James Crawshaw and referred to as 'quadrangular'. Thomas Champion's advert in the 1828 trade directory mentions this as *"the principle of which is adapted to any number of uses, and which has been adopted for all the show knives in various parts of the kingdom"*.

Nothing is heard of the knife from the late 1820s in the trade directories until the late 19th century when the story of adding a blade for every year is firmly established. There are many references to this and then to the putting in of blades every five years. The Norfolk Street showrooms (picture below) were disposed of in 1929 after which the knife was possibly less in public view.



In 1851 Rodgers created a second multi-bladed knife, the Norfolk Knife for the Great Exhibition and this is now on show at the Cutlers' Hall, Sheffield.

Life after Rodgers!

With the decline and eventual closure of Joseph Rodgers as an independent business in 1968 both the Year Knife and Norfolk Knife were put up for sale. No doubt to the consternation of many at the time no attempt was made to acquire the Year Knife for the city from public funds. However, Stanley Tools stepped in and acquired the knife in 1969 for £2,500 at Sotheby's.



The knife was restored by Stan Shaw at the time and the knife was exhibited by Stanleys at their Woodside Works as well as being used in promotions and loaned out for exhibitions.

Following the closure of Woodside, Ken Hawley gained a promise that the knife would be entrusted to the care of the Hawley Collection. This was achieved when the new Hawley Gallery opened at Kelham Island Museum in 2010. Until then the knife was housed at Cutlers' Hall.