



The Sealed Knot Society

DISPLAY DESCRIPTION



Drums and Colours display

Before you, you will see a selection of the Drummers of the Sealed Knot.

The most relatable way for you to think about how the Drums and Colours division worked during the 17th Century is to think of them as the historical version of your mobile phone. If you were an average foot soldier, these people here are the technology that you need to receive notifications, provide entertainment and a chance to show off, and figure out your location.

On the battlefield (as you will see later) it is very noisy with a lot of smoke and chaos all around – the voice of an officer shouting commands is something you would not be likely to be able to hear on its own. The drummers would keep a close eye on the officers and play different beats to relay their commands including everything from ‘attack now!’ to ‘re-form’. The sound of a small number of drummers playing the same beat is much louder than the sound of a voice, and soldiers were trained to recognise the different sounds of ‘notifications’ just the same as you might be able to tell the difference between a text or an email on your phone and would respond with the correct action.

The other use for the drums was to help the soldiers keep pace, providing a rhythm when they are marching, and letting them know what speed they are expected to go at. They would play a slower, steadier beat for longer marches as the armies travelled across the country, and a faster, more urgent beat for when the enemy was in sight and the army needed to move quickly to attack.

The drummers are playing a series of different rhythms for you, try stamping your feet in time with the different beats and see if you can figure out which ones are for the long marches, and which ones are for the attack!

Joining the drummers now are the Colour party. ‘Colours’ or ‘Standards’ are the large 6ft square flags that were used by each regiment during the English Civil War.

Each regiment had its own set of colours, usually following a particular colour-scheme, with higher ranking officers having the plainer ones, and lower ranking officers having ones that are more divided, either by using stripes, or quartering the backgrounds. The Colour was seen as the ‘pride of the regiment’ and soldiers fought hard to protect the standards at all costs.

The colours acted as the 17th Century version of your sat-nav or maps app. The Standard bearer (the name given to the person carrying the colour) would be told where to go, and by holding it up high would be able to guide the soldiers to the area of the battlefield where they were needed. When everything becomes a bit chaotic and the officers are shouting for the troops to re-form, they will be told to do so 'on their colour'. With the drummers providing the 'notification' that tells the soldiers to re-form, the colour then acts as a 'pin on the map' showing them where they should be. In combination, this was a highly effective way to communicate in the heat of battle.

The other role of the colour is to 'show off' to the enemy, just like there is a bit of competition over who is the best on social media these days, English Civil War soldiers liked to claim that they were the best on the battlefield. The standard bearers would 'display the colours' by flourishing them in complicated movements so that the opposition could see which regiments were present on the field of battle and would know them by their reputations.

Standard bearers worked hard to learn these flourishes and would compete with each other for the most complicated moves or who could keep going the longest – a type of historical 'flex'. These displays would also often be accompanied by a drum beat that basically conveyed to the enemy 'come and have a go if you think you're hard enough'!

If you wish to have a closer look at either the Drums or the Colours, please feel free to approach our members on the Living History camp and ask as many questions as you want – you may even be able to learn a drum beat or two for yourself.