



The Sealed Knot Society

COMMENTARY TRANSCRIPT



Sword Display

During the English Civil War the basic infantry troops such as pikemen and musketeers would be equipped with a cheap sword called a 'hanger' or 'attack' - this would be purchased by their commanding officer. He would normally be a lord or a very rich man so to keep costs down he would find the cheapest swords available and on most occasions the only thing they were good for was chopping wood.

Officers and Cavalrymen would supply their own sword, and the wealth and experience of the officer would determine what sort they would have. A veteran officer with battlefield experience would choose a sword depending on their fighting style whether it would be a 'rapier', a 'mortuary sword', or a higher quality 'hanger'. Scottish officers favoured the native 'Scottish Broadsword'. The different swords were suited to different types of combat and would suit different fighting styles, with some relying on strength, whereas others needed more in the way of nimbleness and quick movements.

You will see these different fighting styles amongst our swordsmen as the display continues, and our Sealed Knot swordsmen earn themselves nicknames such as "The Hulk" and "The Ballerina" depending on how they approach the skill. It takes many years to train to be one of the better swordsmen now, just as it did back in the 17thC, but for us there is the added element of keeping our members safe, to portray swordplay effectively without actually causing harm to each another is something these members train hard to achieve.

The most senior officers usually came from a rich family and would often have very little Battlefield experience - they normally chose the 'rapier' which would be the only sword thought fit for a gentleman. They would be taught the art of defence of single combat using a rapier as a civilian, to be able to fight with another swordsman one-on-one, but this wasn't always much use in a battlefield situation.

By the 17th century, there were many schools of sword available to the wealthy. French, English, German, and Italian schools all had influence in Britain at that time however, it was the Italian school, in 'Spanish rapier' style that was most common with royalty and the rich and famous. Many of the aspects of combat during the Civil War were brought back to the UK by officers and soldiers who had served on the continent during the 30 years war, and swordsmanship was no different.

However, for the battlefield, it's a different story a more direct approach would be required. On the battlefield, there is no Honour, just survival, so more direct slashing style was used to cause maximum damage. Because at the end of the day, the number one priority when you're in a battle is to still be alive at the end!

Pikemen would use their swords at close quarters to hack at the enemy when a 'point of pike' had turned into a 'press of pike' so the longer weapon was no longer of use. By this point there would not be much space to swing a sword, so there was very little use for high levels of training in attack and defence.

Musketeers would resort to their swords if they had run out of powder or shot, often wielding their 'clubbed' musket in one hand as a cudgel and a sword in the other. Musketeers were always the more manoeuvrable arm, so the chances are that they would have drilled more in the use of swords and may have had the edge over a pikeman in this type of combat.

If you would like to know more about swords, and their use in the English Civil War, please do come and speak to our members on Living History who will be happy to answer your questions and show you these weapons up close.