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978-1-107-67015-0 - Sword, Lance and Bayonet: A Record of the Arms of the British Army and Navy
Charles Ffoulkes and Captain E. C. Hopkinson

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PLATE I



HENRY HERBERT, TENTH EARL OF PEMBROKE (1734–1794)

Colonel of the First Dragoons

From the portrait at Wilton House by Sir Joshua Reynolds

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A Record of the Arms of the British Army & Navy

BY

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AND

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“Cedit Ensis Calamo”

CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1938

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-67015-0 - Sword, Lance and Bayonet: A Record of the Arms of the British Army and Navy

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107670150

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First published 1938
First paperback edition 2013

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-67015-0 Paperback

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Preface

Prior to the existence of a standing army in this country the weapons in use were those of personal idiosyncrasy, and indeed, in the early days of the organized Army, there was little control of pattern or design. The arms of the earlier periods have been studied in detail and their history can be found in the pages of any standard work on arms and armour. It has been no light task to trace and record, within the compass of one volume, the story of the gradual superannuation of these descendants of primitive weapons. Those who knew the *arme blanche* as a sight of everyday familiarity neglected to remember that the pen is mightier than the sword, and none of the students of military equipment made any serious attempt to help future generations with written or pictorial record. It would therefore seem to be left to us to recite, as well as may be, its funeral oration. Sins of omission and commission we have doubtless committed. Such as these may be, we pray the reader to forgive and ask him to remember the need for brevity and the endless and often futile research entailed.

Without generous help and advice from many the task would have been wellnigh insurmountable, and the production of this work as it stands is in no small measure due to the assistance rendered to us by the officers of the Royal Library, Windsor Castle, of the War Office Library, of the Public Record Office, of the Royal United Services Institution, by Mr J. W. Latham of the Wilkinson Sword Company and the Rev. Percy Sumner, F.S.A. We would also express our indebtedness to the Under-Secretary of State for War, the Comptroller of H.M. Stationery Office, the Officer Commanding the 15/19th Hussars, and to the Council of the Society for Army Historical Research for leave to reproduce certain illustrations and for the loan of half-tone blocks.

C. FF.
E. C. H.

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Introduction

Man has always been and always will be a combative animal. From his excursions in search of food, to acquire territory, to safeguard his family, to avenge real or imaginary wrongs, we can trace an important part of the history of the world, illustrated by the weapons he has used.

Hands and teeth, wood, stone, bronze and iron have been in turn used and adapted by man to achieve his purpose, which was ever to obtain sovereignty and superiority over his neighbour.

We do not propose to deal with the sling and the bow in these pages, although these may be said to have been to some extent the precursors of the firearm; nor shall we discuss the evolution of the club or mace, although this weapon in its most primitive form was used by all combatants in the trench warfare on the Western Front in 1914–18. It should, however, be noted that it is from the sharpened Stone-Age club that, in the process of experiments spread over thousands of years, the sword was developed. Of all these primitive weapons the lance has remained the same tree sapling of antiquity with but a metal point added, and eventually the point taken off and attached to the firearm to form the bayonet.

Under present consideration the sword is the most important of all these weapons, and yet for centuries the most highly skilled craftsmen failed to produce a completely satisfactory weapon. The Greek, the Roman, and before him the Bronze-Age warrior realized that the true function of the sword was to attack the enemy hand to hand, the defence being achieved by the shield on the left arm. Therefore, he favoured a short well-balanced handy weapon which vanished with the Saxons and Danes only to reappear in the ornamental swords of the French Infantry of the first half of the nineteenth century, and of the British bandsmen of the Victorian period. The great swords of

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the mounted knight from the tenth to the fifteenth century are lacking in every quality which a sword should possess. The grips are small, the blades heavy and ill balanced and the points of little or no use for the thrust. The handguards are negligible, but that may be accounted for by the fact that the hand was protected by mail or plate. The battle-axe or mace would have been a more serviceable weapon, but these were not so favoured as the sword, which in the course of centuries became the symbol of chivalry, justice and military power.

This neglect of the essentials in defensive and offensive arms is very noticeable all through the ages. We find armour attached with straps that could easily be cut off, helmets which were often more of a hindrance than a defence, and weapons like the halberd and gisarme of such intricate design that they hampered foot soldiers in close formation, as the Swiss found after the Battle of Arebo in 1442, when they reverted to the primitive pike. In more modern times the head-dresses of Cavalry and Infantry were so entirely unsuited for campaigning that it seems incredible that they should have been designed by soldiers for soldiers; and when, to this ornate panoply is added a useless appendage like the sabretache the brain reels with this sartorial Pelion on Ossa. In the last half of the sixteenth century, when defensive armour was being gradually discarded, the long rapier with its complex handguard was developed, and at a later date the more complete guard of the broadsword found favour and eventually became identified with Cromwell's trooper and later with the Highlander. The fact that "Highland swords" were ordered for the English Cavalry in 1707 would seem to suggest that it was found to be a serviceable weapon and as such was used by Cavalry and by the Grenadiers of the Line Regiments up to 1751 if not later. We shall refer at length later on to the Lance, Halberd, Pike and other weapons, but for the present we will confine our investigations to the written or printed records which deal more particularly with the swords of the army at various periods.

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