

British Naval Edged Weapons—An Overview

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INTRODUCTION

British historians usually refer to the period from the mid-1700 through 1900 as the Age of Empire because it was a period of great expansion for the British Empire. For the first 60 years or so through the early 1800s the Royal Navy became the largest naval force in the world. This growth arose from the continuous wars being fought on the Continent and with America. This period also coincided with the age when sailing ships under the command of bold masters could decide the outcome of both land and sea campaigns.

A considerable amount of basic research has been performed on British naval edged weapons and much of what the author has learned and presents here is based on this work and his own observations. Captain Bosanquet set the standard in 1955 when he documented many of the swords at the Royal Maritime Museum in Greenwich.¹ Later, in 1962, Kennard and May prepared a short monogram² on naval small arms. This work was followed by May and Annis's 1970 two-volume work that has become the bible on British naval edged weapons.³ This same year Annis prepared a monograph that did a fine job of relating early American and British naval edged weapons.⁴ Each of these books is a definitive work in its own right and provides the beginning or experienced collector of naval edged weapons a wealth of information. The most recent work that addresses British and American naval edged weapons is by Gilkerson.⁵ Unfortunately, except for Gilkerson's book, all of the others are long out of print and are as rare as the swords.

This article addresses three types of edged weapons: swords, cutlasses, and dirks. Through the reign of William IV that ended in 1837, the British Navy was almost continuously at war. For about a 20-year period from 1805 through 1827 the Admiralty gave considerable thought to standardizing the edged weapons used by naval officers. The first navy regulation sword was defined in 1805 and modified in 1825.⁶ Just two years later, the pattern sword was revised again and the pattern 1827 sword⁷ remains the regulation naval officer's sword through today.



The period of interest is from about 1760 through about 1880 with emphasis on edged weapons made between about 1770 and 1850. As noted above, the definitive reference works on the subject have all been written. Hopefully, the information presented here and the accompanying photographs will shed some new light on the subject for both novice and experienced collectors.

SWORD MAKING IN ENGLAND

The period from 1760 to 1815 was a time of almost continuous war on the continent. England, like other countries, was a major supplier of swords for its own use and for export. In fact many of the swords used by American army and navy officers were made in England. The quality of its swords, primarily using blades from Solingen, was without equal. During this period sword making was a multi-entity endeavor with more than one firm or entity involved. The blades were typically obtained from Solingen, a hiltier made the hilt, and a handle binder did handle wire wraps. A cutler, whose name appeared on the blade, typically sold the final product. The cutler was in reality an assembler of the swords bearing his name. However, since there were no rules on sword markings, anyone, including hatters, jewelers, accoutrements suppliers, silversmiths, or military suppliers could mark a sword as their own. These “maker” markings are a

valuable source of information for dating English swords. Bosanquet first compiled a list of English sword makers and assemblers in 1955. This list was expanded on in Annis and May's work published almost 15 years later. Both these works specifically address naval swords but their listings are generally applicable to all types of swords. Use of the lists in these two reference works is invaluable in dating British swords as well as British made American swords.

English swords are well known for the quality of the blade blue and gilding. This was a highly developed craft in England and it cannot be reproduced to this date. This work was performed by yet another entity in the sword making cycle. The technique was fairly complex for its day. First, the blade was covered with an acid resistant wax and the blade motifs were scratched through the wax coating. Next the blade was etched by an acid bath or wash and the acid seeped through the wax scratches to the steel blade. The wax coating was removed, and a copper sulphate solution was placed on the areas to be gilded and the gilding process began. It typically involved a mixture of gold and mercury. These materials were placed into the previously etched surfaces and fired. During the firing process, the mercury evaporated and the firing blued the blade and left the gold in the etched designs. Workers in this trade had significant health problems from mercury poisoning. Blade surfaces that were to remain clear were coated with a form of shellac before the firing. The final step was blade polishing.⁸ This was an art

form that English sword makers were world renown for, but it lost favor about 1835. Many of the swords and dirks described below have, or once had, blue and gilded blades with the gilding on the presentation sword blades extremely elaborate.

The designs etched on British sword blades are also helpful in dating a piece, in the absence of a maker's name. Many dress or officers swords were etched with a Royal Coat of Arms as well as a cypher. Plate 1 illustrates the Royal Coats of Arms in use for the period of interest and the dates they were in use.

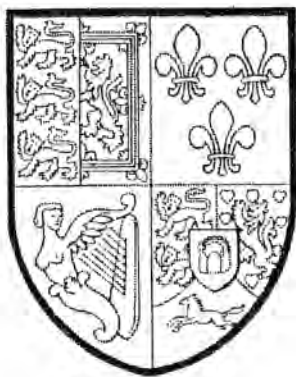
The coat of arms for Queen Victoria, not shown, was used after 1837. These coats of arms typically have two mottoes on them:

Around the shield—*boni soit qui mal y pense*, which means shamed be he who thinks evil of it.

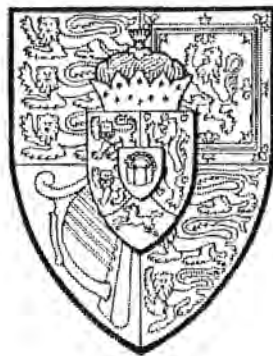
In a riband—*Dieu et mon droit*, which means God and *my right*.

For the period of interest, the major distinction is the use of the fleur-de-lis, instead of the rampant lion (Scotland), in the third quadrant. Where the fleur-de-lis is present, the sword predates 1801. Plate 2 shows a gilded post 1801 coat of arms on a sword blade.

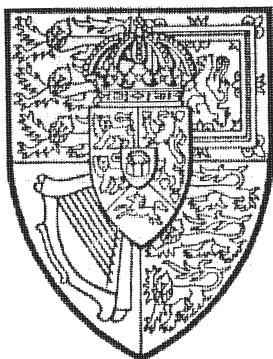
Each monarch from George III through Victoria also used different cyphers. The reigns of these Monarchs were as follows; George III 1760-1820, George IV 1820-1830, William IV 1830-1837, and Victoria 1837-1901. Cyphers were also used on the blades of early cutlasses issued by the Board of Ordinance. Thus, the blade cypher is yet another way to date a particular naval sword or cutlass. Plate 3 illustrates the cyphers used and Plate 4 shows a typical crown with cypher as gilded on a sword blade.



Prior to 1801



1801-16

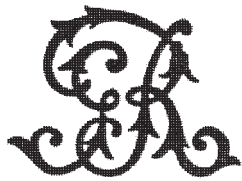


1816-37

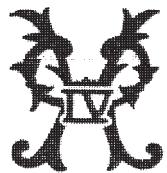
Plate 1. Royal Coats of Arms (Source—British Military Swords From 1800 to the Present Day by John Wilkinson Latham p 11.



Plate 2. Sword blade showing post 1801 coat of arms.



George I, II, III



George IV



William IV

OFFICERS SWORDS

European naval officers began to rely on this type of edged weapon in the latter part of the 17th century. The small sword was worn by civilian and military alike and was used for dress occasions. The fighting weapon of choice during this period was the hanger that was used for cutting as opposed to thrusting. It has a relatively short curved single edged blade, which is well suited for fighting in close quarters, a simple grip and knuckle-bow, and a cutlass type guard.

Small Swords

The popularity of the small sword made it the choice of naval officers for dress occasions. Although the hilts of small swords did not vary significantly except with time, it came with several types of straight blades that were in use simultaneously. These blade configurations included hollow triangles, square, flattened ovals and what is referred to as the colichemarde design. Plate 6 illustrates a very early small sword chased with naval or maritime motifs that has a colichemarde blade. The 32 inch long hollow triangular blade is wide at its top and converting to a hollow triangle at its lower section. It is thought that the wide blade width at its top made it better suited for parrying thrusts relative to the typical slender blades seen on most small swords. This particular sword is silver mounted and the hallmarks on the knuckle-bow date it to 1762-1763. It also has the maker's initials [W.K.] indicating that William Kinman,¹¹ a London goldsmith, made it.

The hilt is illustrated on Plate 7. The nautical motifs on each side of the guard differ, but those on opposite sides of the guards are mirror images of each other. The motifs on the ricasso are musicians (drummer and flutist) as opposed to the stands of arms seen on other swords like this. The grip is wrapped with silver wire with brass bands between. The

author has seen four of these swords in the last decade so this basic design must have been popular in its time.

Slotted Hilt Hangers

While small swords satisfied dress requirements for naval officers, there was a need for fighting swords since naval officers were expected to engage the enemy in hand to hand combat. During the 1770s, a popular sword among both army and navy officers was the brass mounted slotted

Plate 3. Cyphers of British Monarchs (Source—British Military Swords From 1800 to Present Day by John Wilkinson Latham p 10.



Plate 4. Georgian cypher on sword blade.

The type of fouled anchor emblem on the blade, the guard or the grip, can also date British naval swords. The Royal Navy used the anchor with cable or fouled anchor as early as the 1600s. However, it wasn't until about 1812 that the fouled anchor was used with a Georgian crown above it.⁹ Plate 5 shows the typical emblems on sword langets with, and without, the crown above the anchor.

Early cutlasses also have a system that can be used for dating as well as identifying the supplier. Research performed and documented¹⁰ by Annis and May led to a system whereby viewer marks on cutlasses can be used to date the blade through about 1815.



Plate 5. Langets illustrating use of cabled anchor and cabled anchor with crown.



Plate 6. Early silver hilt sword by William Kidman with naval/nautical motifs, c1763.

hilt hanger. Its name is derived from the guard and knuckle-bow that is formed from a single sheet of brass with slots or cutouts. The grip is typically turned wood with a wire wrap and simple brass ferrule. The most prevalent pommel is urn shaped and an anchor engraved on the pommel indicates navy use. The blade is slightly curved and relatively short, making it an ideal naval fighting sword.

Two fighting swords are illustrated in Plate 8. These swords have a knuckle-bow and guard made from a single piece of brass or copper with the lower portion of the knuckle-bow and the guard slotted. The sword on the right has a 28 1/4 inch long 1 5/8 inch wide slightly curved blade with a wide central fuller to its tip. The urn pommel has a fouled anchor inscribed at its rear and the wood grip is wrapped with double twisted



Plate 7. Grip of early naval sword by William Kidman.

copper wire. The inscribed anchor at the rear of the pommel indicates naval use. The sword on the left has a rectangular wood grip with the wire missing. Its blade is 28 3/4 inch long and 5/8 inch wide with a similar wide fuller. It has a fouled anchor engraved on the obverse side of the pommel (see inset).

Plate 9 shows two more fighting swords, one with urn pommel and one with lion head pommel. The sword on the left has a 23 inch long by 1 1/2 inch wide blade with a double fuller—shorter than the Plate 8 sword blades. It has a relatively flat wooden grip with the wire missing and a rounded pommel with the fouled anchor engraved at its rear (see inset). The blade is stamped with a crown above *H/vey* on its obverse indicating manufacture by one of the Harvey's who made swords from 1690.¹² The sword on the right has two inset anchors with a lion head pommel. Its blade is also relatively short; 24 inches long by 1 1/4 inch wide, and has a double fuller. The rounded spiral wood grip is wrapped with a single relatively wide strand of copper wire. Both swords are compact and well balanced compared to the others shown above and are thus ideally suited for sea service.

Five Ball Hilt

Prior to 1805, another very popular dress sword among senior officers was the configuration that is referred to as the five-ball hilt. It is similar to the infantry Officers pattern of 1786.¹³ This sword has an octagonal pillow pommel, fluted ivory grip with a center band containing an anchor, ending in a simple ferrule. The knuckle-bow has 5 small balls as does the outer shell of the guard, hence the name. There is usually a small anchor within the open space of the shell guard. The pommel has a ring for a sword knot. These dress swords were typically worn by Flag Officers and Commissioned Officers from about 1790.

A typical five-ball hilt with spadroon blade is shown on Plate 10. This sword has the anchor and crown on the grip emblem plus the anchor inset in the guard opening (see Plates 11 and 12). The blade is 1 1/8 inch wide by 30 inch long with a single fuller extending almost to its tip—a typical spadroon blade. It is blue and gilded over about half its length. The obverse is decorated with florals, a stand of arms, and a Georgian crown over the Georgian cypher (GR). The reverse has florals, a single rose and the Royal Coat of Arms with both mottoes. This coat of arms does not have the fleur-de-lis in the third quadrant so it postdates 1801 when the Coat of Arms was changed. The leather scabbard has a top mount with frog stud and ring, a simple center mount with ring and a relatively long chape that is a later replacement. The reverse of the top mount is engraved *Barrett/Corney & Corney/479 Strand*. This London firm¹⁴ was at this address from 1803 to 1805.



Plate 8. Two naval fighting swords with slotted hilts and anchors on the pommel, c1780.

The underside of the guard is marked with [FT] the stamp of Francis Thurkle, a very prominent London maker of swords from about 1760 through 1801, when he died.¹⁵ Thurkle is known for his American and British naval swords. Some believe that his mark was only placed on swords for export but the crown over the anchor indicates this is clearly not the case.

Fighting Swords

Naval officers needed fighting swords and those with relatively short curved saber like blades were the most popular. In 1796, the Light Infantry and Grenadiers had a sword pattern that would be adopted by naval officers. Plate 13 shows a fighting sword, which was adopted from earlier army patterns.



Plate 9. Two naval fighting swords—one with anchor on pommel, one with lion head pommel and two inset anchors, c1780.

It has the classic lion head pommel with lanyard ring and a checkered hand fitted ivory grip. The S bar stirrup hilt has a two crown/anchor riveted (rare) to the guard. The blue and gilded blade is 1 3/8 inch wide by 29 3/4 inch long with about a 2 inch curve break. It has an unknown makers die stamp on both sides of the ricasso. The obverse is decorated with a geometric, the post 1801 Royal Coat of Arms with both mottoes and a sunburst above. The reverse is decorated with a geometric, lady liberty with a shield, spear and plumed headdress, and the

Georgian crown with a canopy above and the Georgian cypher below.

Pattern Swords

The Royal Navy prescribed the first pattern on 4 August 1805 in an order from the Admiralty. The patterns for these swords have never been found. However, the Admiralty explicitly provided for stirrup hilt swords in its order of 1825.¹⁶ The 1825 requirements also explicitly defined grip and pommel configurations as a function of rank. Swords with the straight “D” hilt which otherwise could be defined as 1805 swords as well as the rank distinctions existed before 1825. We still see what are supposed to be pattern 1825 swords referred to as pattern 1805 swords and vice versa. Thus, there is some disagreement on whether the explicit requirements of 1825 were in fact a revision to the unfound 1805 requirements or just an attempt to formally document them. The stirrup hilt configuration is very similar to the light cavalry officer pattern of 1796¹⁷ with a bird's head pommel.

The 1805 pattern provided for a reverse P knuckle-bow (also referred to as stirrup), turned down quillon and langets with anchor and cable (fouled anchor). Additionally, shortly after 1812, a crown was added over the fouled anchor on the langets. The 1825 pattern changed the guard to a



Plate 10. Five-ball hilt sword with pillow pommel by Francis Thurkle, c1790.



Plate 11. Typical grip medallion with engraved anchor.

straight stirrup hilt or D guard. Otherwise both swords are identical. Note that most officers still had both dress and fighting swords with the fighting swords being similar to those described above. The 1805 sword distinctions among ranks were determined by the pommel prescribed for Commanders and above. Lieutenants and Midshipman had a similar sword with a black fish skin grip, and lower ranks

such as Warrant Officers had a black fish skin grip with a stepped pommel. There is some uncertainty as to exactly what Midshipmen wore. According to the 1825 requirements, commissioned officers wore a white ivory grip lion head pommel sword, Warrant Officers and Masters Mates wore a black fish skin grip lion head pommel sword, and Midshipmen wore black fish skin grip stepped pommel swords.

During the War of 1812 Captain James Lawrence of the USS *Chesapeake*, with an untrained and inexperienced crew, accepted a challenge from the captain of the HBMS *Shannon*, and sailed from Boston harbor to defeat in June 1813. A sword worn by the British naval officer Lieutenant William Wallis during the engagement between the *Chesapeake* and *Shannon* is illustrated on Plate 14.

This sword is a pattern 1805 with lion's mask pommel, wire wrapped ivory grip and simple D guard with an anchor and crown on its langets. Its owner had the inside of the knuckle-bow engraved: *To commemorate Shannon and Chesapeake*, and the inside guard engraved: *June 1st 1813*, to commemorate the engagement. The single edged blade is 3/4 inch wide by 27 inch long and bright etched. The obverse has a leafy spray with flower, a fouled anchor, and a stand of arms with a floral spray. The reverse has an oak leaf spray, a leafy spray, a stand of arms with a halberd and cannon, and another leafy spray. The leather scabbard has three



Plate 12. Typical inset anchor in cross guard.



Plate 13. Fighting sword based on Light Infantry and Grenadiers pattern with large inset anchor in guard, c1805.

brass mounts with the maker's name: *Read/Sword Cutler/Portsmouth* on the reverse of the top mount. Read was a Portsmouth cutler from 1781 to 1823.¹⁸

Plate 15 illustrates the hilts of three different midshipmen's swords. The earliest sword is on the right. It was made sometime before 1812 since the langet does not have a crown above the anchor. It is a relatively small version of the stirrup hilt with a reverse P knuckle-bow (1805). It has a



Plate 14. Pattern sword of Royal Navy Lieutenant William Wallis commemorating *USS Chesapeake* and *HBMS Shannon* engagement on 1 June 1813 (NYHS Collection).

checkered black ivory grip formed to the hand and wrapped three twisted gilded wires. It has a simple stepped pommel, back strap and ferrule with a lanyard ring just below the pommel on the knuckle-bow, which is rounded. The simple guard has a turned down round ball quillon. It has a 27 inch long deeply etched flattened diamond double-edged blade that is 3/4 inch wide at the ricasso. The obverse is etched with florals, a stand of arms, and a crown over Georgian cypher and florals. The reverse is etched with florals, a stand of arms, the Royal Coat of Arms with both mottoes, ending in floral designs.

The middle sword in Plate 15 is relatively ornate with a presentation on the scabbard top mount. The presentation reads: *A present from Lady Blackwood to Mr. Wm Hamilton Decr 1819*. William Alexander Baillie Hamilton was the third son of the Reverend Charles Baillie Hamilton and Lady Charlotte. Being able to choose his career, he went to sea as a midshipman on the *Rochfort* (80) in 1816. Upon leaving the Royal Naval College in 1819, he went to sea on the *Active* (48). From here he served on *Euryalus* (42) and on completion of his cruise, he passed his Lieutenants exam in 1823. In 1826, he assumed command of the sloop *Doterel*. Shortly thereafter he went to assume command of the *Pelican* (18) in the Mediterranean; there he engaged pirates and was promoted to Captain in 1828. He went on to become a Rear Admiral in 1855, Vice Admiral in 1862, and retired in 1865.

The black fish skin grip is wrapped with three strands of gilded wire with the center one coiled. The pommel, back strap, ferrule and rounded knuckle-bow are all chased



Plate 15. Three midshipmen's pattern swords dating c1810 to c1820.



Plate 16. Three commissioned officers pattern swords dating c1805 to c1860.

with floral motifs. The guard is straight and terminates with an engraved ball shaped turned down quillon. Note that the langets have an anchor with the crown above confirming that use of the crown was adopted sometime before 1819. This sword has a relatively narrow, 3/4 inch wide, spadron like blade that is 28 inches long. It is well worn but the visible etchings include a Georgian crown, the Royal Coat of Arms with both mottoes, and floral and military motifs. The top scabbard mount reverse reads: *R Johnston, Late Bland and Foster, Sword Cutler and Belt maker to His Majesty, 68 James Strt London*. Richard Johnston was at 68 James Street from 1798 that is consistent with the presentation.¹⁹

The sword on the left in Plate 15 is relatively plain and probably represents what most midshipmen wore. The black fish grip is wrapped with three stands of gilded wire with the center one coiled; the pommel, back strap, and ferule are plain. the flat reverse P knuckle-bow is flat with a slot below the pommel for a lanyard. The guard terminates with a pronounced flat turned quillon. It has a 24 3/4 inch long diamond shaped blade that is 3/4 inch wide. The blade is etched with a series of simple geometrics and florals. The top scabbard mount reverse reads: *Dunsford Fore Street Dock*. Dunsford was a sword maker at Fore St. in Devonport from 1812.²⁰

The blades on all three swords have similar widths that were probably typical of midshipmen swords. The scabbards that were made over a period of 10-15 years are very different and probably reflect period as opposed to stylistic changes. The early sword (pre 1812) has very simple small

mounts while both later swords have relatively long mounts with the presentation sword having an ornate frog stud on the top mount.

Plate 16 shows the hilts of three stirrup hilt commissioned officers swords. The sword on the right has a straight D guard that should conform to the 1825 regulations. However, with only a fouled anchor on the langet, this sword was made well before 1825. It has the straight stirrup guard with smooth ivory grip, including 7 wraps of three-strand wire, and a lion's head pommel. The langets are inscribed with an anchor and cable. it has 1 1/8 inch by 32 1/2 inch long blue and gilt spadron blade with a single fuller. The blade obverse shows the Royal Coat of Arms (with standing lion) with both mottoes amid plummage. The reverse shows forals, a fouled anchor with Georgian crown above and floral designs. the reverse scabbard top mount is engraved *Dunsford/Fore Str/Devonport*. As noted above, Dunsford was a sword maker at Fore St. beginning in 1812. This maker, plus the absence of a crown on the langets, is consistent with dating this sword no later than 1812. Additionally, its spadron blade is almost identical to that on the five-ball hilt sword with spadron blade shown on Plate 10 above.

The middle sword on Plate 16, illustrates a typical pattern officers dress sword. It has a reverse P knuckle-bow with a smooth black ivory grip, a three strand wire wrapping, and a lion's head pommel. The lion's mane extends the full length of the back strap and the langets have the crown over the anchor. According to the regulations, this was a lieutenants dress sword. The rounded double-edged be is 31 inch long by 1/2 inch wide. The obverse is etched with the supplier's name: *Ede Son & Ravenscroft/Chancery Lane/London E.C*.

The sword on the left in Plate 16 presents a later commissioned officers sword. It is much smaller scale than that the one on the right. It also has a straight stirrup guard with smooth ivory grip, wrapped with three-strand gilded wire, and a lion's head pommel. The langets are inscribed with an anchor and cable plus a crown over the anchor. The blade is triangular shaped and is 5/8 inch wide and 28 inch long. It is blue and



Plate 17. Pattern 1827 sword with pipe back blade, c1835.



Plate 18. Pattern 1827 sword with Wilkinson blade, c1850.

gilded and etched with florals and stands of arms. The reverse scabbard top mount is marked *Zachariah/Portsmo*. Zachariah was a jeweler and goldsmith in Portsmouth from 1835 to 1865, dating this sword to sometime after 1835.²¹

In 1827 the Admiralty decided a sword pattern that could be worn for dress and also used in combat. These swords remain the regulation sword for Royal navy officers but the blade configurations and widths have changed over time.

An early pattern 1827 sword dating from about 1835 is shown on Plate 17. It has a quill back double-edged spear point blade that is 1 1/8 inch wide and 29 inch long. The obverse/reverse is etched with the maker's name: *Andrews/Pall Mall/London*. The other etchings include a crown and fouled anchor on reverse and royal arms on reverse. The scabbard top locket reverse is also marked; *Andrews/Pall Mall/London*. Andrews was at 18 Pall Mall (1819-1820) and at 9 Pall Mall (1821-1825).²² This sword has features that indicate it was made after 1832 but before the mid-1830s. The scabbard has a frog stud plus two lockets with rings indicating it is post 1832. The sword also has a ring on the ferrule for a sword knot—a feature that did not extend beyond the mid 1830s.

Plate 18 shows a later version of the pattern 1827 sword made by Wilkinson and it has what is referred to as the Wilkinson blade. It dates from about 1856. It has 1 1/8 inch wide by 30 1/2 inch long blade with spear point. The blade obverse blade is marked with crown and motto, and the reverse is marked *Gillot/36/Strand/London*, fouled anchor and crown. Gillot was a London cutler from 1828.²³ This sword is an early transitional piece as evidence by short lion mane on hilt since the regulations required full length. The grip is probably a holdover from an earlier sword. The ring on the ferrule for a sword knot has also been removed and this feature did not extend beyond the mid-1830s. The scabbard has a longer (7+ inch) chape that is consistent with 1846 change to Wilkinson blade for these lion head pommel swords. It has a plaque at the rear of the top mount that reads: *_son/_sword/maker/Pall Mall/_*.

The Plate 19 sword has a claymore blade and dates c1870. The unique blade is 1 1/2 inch wide by 32 inches

long and is double fullered. It was made by Wilkinson and has a spear point. The obverse blade is engraved with the proof mark, the owner's family crest and his name *E. Boyle*, an intricate vine, a fouled anchor with crown and sunburst above, ending with an intricate vine. The reverse is etched: *Henry/Wilkinson/Pall Mall/London*, the Wilkinson crest with banner reading *by appointment* below, an intricate vine, the Victorian coat of arms, and an intricate vine. Wilkinson was a prominent supplier of swords from 1772 to the present day.²⁴

Claymore blades were rarely used but are evident in 1860-1880 timeframe. The grip has full lion mane that indicates the later date. The guard is relatively large and does not have a turndown on its reverse. This is rare since most guards had sprung turndowns. After about 1880, the Claymore blade was abandoned in favor of the Wilkinson blade that remained in use through today.

There is one other blade configuration for the pattern 1827 sword. It has a cutlass blade²⁵ and is very rare. Like the progression of the American pattern 1852 naval swords, once the change was made back to the Wilkinson blade, blade widths on pattern 1827 swords were gradually reduced to the relatively narrow blades seen today.

PRESENTATION SWORDS

The early 1800s were times when the actions of ship captains and their ability to use their ships in battle were often the decisive factors in the continuous wars on the continent. Typically, the actions of single ships or relatively small squadrons were quick and decisive and British ships won most of these engagements. To support the military officers engaged in these actions, swords were presented to individuals to honor their gallantry in battle. Three presentation swords including one to a Royal Marine are discussed.

John Pilford Trafalgar Sword

In England, the City of London, London merchants, and the Lloyds' Patriotic Fund awarded swords primarily to



Plate 19. Pattern 1827 sword of Lieutenant Edward Boyle with Claymore blade, c1870.

naval officers for their gallantry in battle. Swords from the Patriotic Fund are the most famous and desired. Lloyds started this Fund in 1803 and it awarded both swords and silver vases for gallantry in action. From the Fund's inception through its termination in May 1809, the Fund awarded a total of about 176 presentation swords²⁶ to British naval marine and army officers who were primarily engaged in the Napoleonic wars. The Lloyds Patriotic Fund swords were all made, or assembled by Richard Teed. His name first appears in the London Directory of 1799 as a jeweler and dealer in antiques. It is not clear how or why the Patriotic fund gave him the contract to provide its swords but each sword is inscribed at the top of the scabbard with *Richard Teed, Dress sword maker to the Patriotic Fund, Lancaster Court, Strand*. Strand was a London Street and the 1811 London Directory, after the Fund ceased to exist, lists Teed as *sword maker to the Patriotic Fund*.²⁷

The first swords were awarded on June 23, 1803 for gallantry during the action between the French ship *Venteux* and the *La Loire*. Three swords were awarded; a 30 pounder to Midshipman Priest, and two 50 pounders to Lieutenants Bowen and Temple. The last sword of record, a 50 pounder, was awarded on August 23, 1810 to a Lieutenant Cox for gallantry while serving on the *Nereide*. For the swords and silver vases awarded, the Fund expended about tens of thousands of pounds during its tenure—a significant sum for the period.

There were three main types of swords (numbers awarded from different references are in parenthesis):

30 pounder (16-17)—Typically awarded to Midshipmen (8) and Mates (4), but several were awarded to Marine Lieutenants (4).

50 pounder (88-89)—Typically awarded to Lieutenants (63), but some were awarded to HEIC Captains (15), Royal Marines (9), a Master and Army officers (3).

100 pounder (39-41)—Typically awarded to Captains and Commanders (34), but some were awarded to Lieutenants commanding (2), an HEIC Commodore (1) and Army officers (2).

The hilts on all swords are identical. The blades are similar but the blue and gilt motifs differ and the presentation background differs; blue lettering on a gold background for the 30 pounder and gold lettering on a blue background for the 50 and 100 pounder. The scabbards and sword belts that accompany each sword differ very significantly with the 100 pounder being most elaborate and the 30 pounder being least elaborate. Today, the 30 pounder with the least elaborate scabbard and belt is the rarest Lloyds' sword.

The fourth, and most elaborate type, of Lloyds sword was awarded to the Captains of each ship that fought under Nelson at Trafalgar, the definitive naval battle of the period, and perhaps in British naval history. Twenty-nine (29)



Plate 20. Lloyds Trafalgar sword presented to Lieutenant John Pilford, commanding *Ajax* (74) (W. Scott Ferris Collection).

Trafalgar swords were awarded with four of them to Lieutenants commanding in the absence of their ship's Captains. Plate 20 shows the Trafalgar sword awarded to Lieutenant John Pilford, commanding the *Ajax* (74).

John Pilford was born in 1776 and entered the Navy in 1788 serving on the *Crown*. On February 1795, he was promoted by Lord Howe to be Lieutenant of the *Russell*. He then served on the *Kingfisher* and helped suppress a mutiny on 1 July 1797. Following that he served on the *Imperieux* and commanded the boats that destroyed the French corvette *Insolente*. Upon renewal of the war with France in 1803 he served on the *Hindostan*, the *Dragon* and finally the *Ajax*. William Brown the Captain of the *Ajax*, returned to England with Robert Calder who was to be tried for a court martial. Thus Pilford, a 1st Lieutenant, found himself commanding the *Ajax* when Nelson's fleet left Cadiz., a few days before the battle. During the battle of Trafalgar, *Ajax* was on the weather column and was engaged with Dumanoir's division; eleven men were lost. Following the battle, he was advanced to Captain in December 1805. He was granted an augmentation of his arms in 1808, and in June 1815, he was nominated Commander of the Bath (CB). From 1827 to 1831, he was captain of the ordinary at Plymouth and died at Stonehenge on 12 July 1834 at age 60.²⁸

While a 100 pounder, the Trafalgar sword differs from the standard 100 pounder in two respects; the scabbard top mount and the recipient's initials placed on the blade.

Each Lloyds presentation sword, scabbard, and belt was presented in a mahogany case lined in blue velvet and



Plate 21. Reverse grip of John Pilford Trafalgar sword.

accompanied by a card that described the meaning of each of the features on the sword hilt. Plate 21 shows the reverse hilt. It has a diamond checkered hand formed ivory grip with a lion's mask pommel and a full back strap chased to represent the skin of a Nemean lion and an ornate ferrule. The cross guard is a Roman Fasces and the knuckle-bow is designed to represent Hercules' club surrounded by a serpent. The cross guard has a block chased with arms at its center with deeply chased leaves on the langets.

All the blades on Lloyds swords are the same size: slightly curved sabers that are 30 1/2 inch long and 1 1/2 inch wide, with a single fuller. They are decorated with blue and gilded etchings over almost their entire length as shown on the above plates, but the blade ornamentation differs. The presentation on Pilford's Trafalgar sword reads:

*FROM THE PATRIOTIC FUND AT LLOYDS TO JOHN
PILFORD: CAPT OF HMS AJAX FOR HIS / MERITORIOUS
SERVICES IN CONTRIBUTING TO THE SIGNAL VICTORY
OVER THE COMBINED / FLEETS OF FRANCE AND SPAIN
OFF CAPE TRAFALGAR ON THE 21st OCTOBER, 1805.*

Except for the name of the officer and ship, this is the standard form of the presentation on all twenty-nine Trafalgar swords.

The scabbard is wood almost completely enclosed with gilded metal. There are two carrying rings in the shape of coiled snakes. Just below the throat there is a large oval medallion with a seated Britannia holding a victors laurel with a background of ships. Above this is a curved panel with the ship name, *Ajax*, and the word *Nelson*, and then *Trafalgar, 21st Octr 1805* on a circular plaque. The scabbard has two long oval cut out panels with a black velvet back-

ground. The uppermost panel contains a naval crown, a helmet, anchor and buoy and a flag, rudder, and laurel sprays against the velvet background. The next metal oval panel has a figure of Hercules an the Hydra with the panel surrounded by a stand of arms that includes an anchor. The lower cutout panel contains a ship's mast, crossed flags, chain shot, an anchor, sails, a Roman Fasces, laurel sprays and an anchor. The bottom gilded panel has Hercules struggling with the Nemean lion surrounded by the same motifs as the middle panel. The chape is edged with bead designs. Plate 22 shows the lower third of the blade and scabbard indicating the extent of the blade's etching.

Admiral Sir Charles Brisbane Curacao Sword

Plate 23 shows the French inspired presentation sword awarded to Sir Charles Brisbane for his capture of Curacao.

In 1806, Brisbane, with the rank of Captain, was in command of the frigate *Arethusa* at the Jamaica Station under Admiral Dacres. In December, he was ordered to proceed with three other ships; *Latona* under command of J. Wood, *Fisgard* under the command of W. Bolton and *Anson* under command of C. Lydiard, to reconnoiter the island of Curacao which was then held by the Dutch. On the evening of December 31st, Brisbane defined a plan to take the Island and it's forts and the action commenced the next morning, on 1 January 1807. Brisbane and his squadron of four ships entered the harbor at dawn, boarded and took two Dutch men of war, and then stormed the two forts in the harbor. Later, Brisbane was awarded another sword by the government of Jamaica for his capture of Curacao.



Plate 22. Lower third of John Pilford sword illustrating obverse blade and scabbard.



Plate 23. Obverse hilt of Brisbane sword showing augmented Brisbane Coat of Arms.

Brisbane was knighted for this action and was also named Governor of Curacao. He remained in this position until he later became Governor of St. Vincent. The officers of the second battalion of the Royal Irish Brigade presented the sword to Brisbane. This unit, 727 strong, did not participate in the capture of Curacao but were assigned to Curacao in June 1807. This sword was presented sometime in 1808. The presentation along the blade obverse reads:

*Presented to His Excellency, / Sir Charles Brisbane, Kt,
by/ the 2nd Battalion, 18th of Royal / Irish * Curacao * 1808.*

Captain William Bolton, who supported Brisbane in the capture of Curacao, was awarded a 100-pound Lloyd's sword for his gallantry during the action. One might ask why the other Captains did not receive Lloyd's swords for their participation in the Curacao action. Probably because both Brisbane and Lydiard had already received 100 pound Lloyd's swords. Earlier on 23 August 1806, while he was again commanding the ship *Arethusa* (38), he received a 100 pound Lloyd's sword for his action against the French ship *Pomana*. These two officers must have been close comrades as evidenced by their later capture of Curacao.

Plates 24 and 25 show the obverse and reverse hilts of the Brisbane Curacao sword. Note that the hilt is of a French design typical of the First Empire. On the obverse, a gold panel shows the newly augmented Brisbane coat of arms supported by a Jack Tar and a Marine with the word Curacao below. These arms are intended to represent the Curacao action. The reverse grip panel shows a miniature depiction of the shoulder belt plate of the 18th Royal Irish Regiment of Foot in solid gold with champleve blue enamel surrounding. The oval plate contains the gilded words of the Regiment's motto *Virtutis Namurcensis Praeuium* around its periphery on blue enamel.



Plate 24. Sword presented by Admiral Sir Charles Brisband for capture of Curacao.

The blue and gilded curved blade is 1 1/4 inch wide and 30 1/2 inch long with a clip point. It has blue and gilded motifs that cover about two thirds of its length. The obverse blade motifs include a geometric design, a leafy spray, a medallion with a standing Lady Liberty holding a Roman Fasces and a liberty cap with stands of arms above and below, ending with a long leaf spray with flowers. The reverse motifs include a different geometric design, a floral spray the presentation panel, a panel with the sun and stars



Plate 25. Reverse hilt of Brisbane sword showing 18th Royal Irish Regiment of Foot shoulder belt plate.

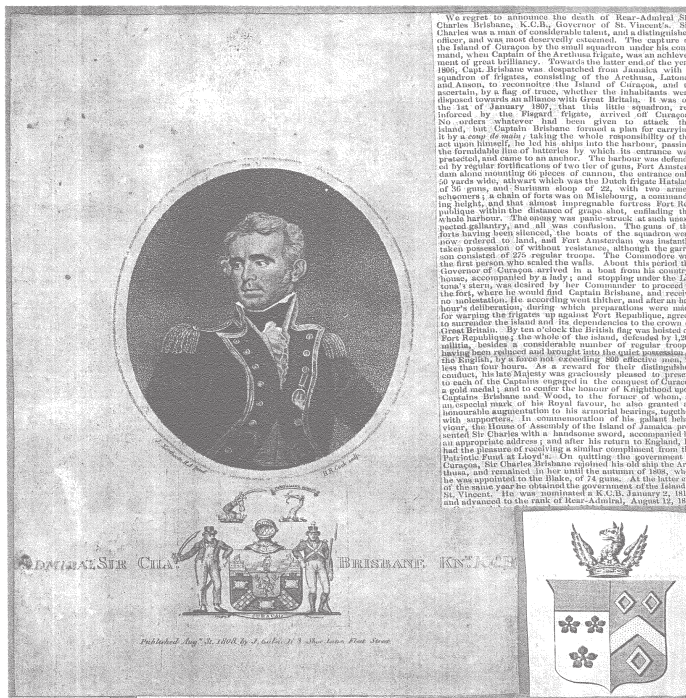


Plate 26. Death Notice and image of Admiral Sir Charles Brisbane.

above a rippling sea, a stand of arms, a leaf spray containing three oval plaques with fleur de lis at their centers, ending with another long leaf spray with flowers.

Brisbane died in his 64th year on St. Vincent. Plate 26 shows an engraving with one of his death notices in local papers of the time, reciting his naval exploits.

Major Sir Robert Torrens, Royal Marines

A very different sword was presented to Major Sir Robert Torrens and it is pictured on Plate 27.



Plate 27. Sword presented to Major Sir Robert Torrens, Royal Marines.

This sword was made by *Rich Teed/Drefs Sword Maker/The Patriotic Fund/London* as shown by the plaque on the scabbard top mount reverse. In Holden's directory of 1811, Richard Teed is still listed as the sword maker to Lloyds Patriotic Fund, but the Fund was no longer awarding swords.

Sir Robert Torrens was a Captain in the Royal Marines as of 26 July 1806. He was promoted to Major on 12 April 1811. The presentation was made some time after this. The Torrens' family coat of arms is on the obverse hilt. It consists of three candles on a shield with a dove above and the Latin motto *deus lumens meum* (God is my light) below.

The hilt, shown on Plate 28, is gold plated silver with touch marks on the pommel, guard and the top two scabbard mounts. The pommel is a Roman soldier with a lion on his helmet. The grip has the small sword form with raised motifs on both sides. The obverse has three different motifs: a crossed trident, fouled anchor and caduceus at the top and bottom and the Torrens family coat of arms within a medallion at the center. The reverse also has three raised motifs: the crossed trident, fouled anchor and caduceus at top and a medallion with Hercules and a lion in the center. The knuckle-bow is a heavy chain. The cross guard has a Roman fasces supported by two chain links and central medallion with fouled anchor in olive branch wreath. The top portion of the oval guard is deeply chased with nautical motifs plus leaves and a lion while the bottom is plain.

The straight blade is 32 inch long by 13/16 inch wide with a concave triangular cross section. It is gold etched to the tip on both sides. The reverse is etched with stands of arms and floral designs and the obverse just has floral designs. The partial presentation is on the reverse blade and it reads: *To Major Rt. Torrens .../Fully presented. .../of serving under his command. .../_ of their high admiration of his. ...* The remainder is undecipherable.



Plate 28. Hilt of Sir Robert Torrens sword.

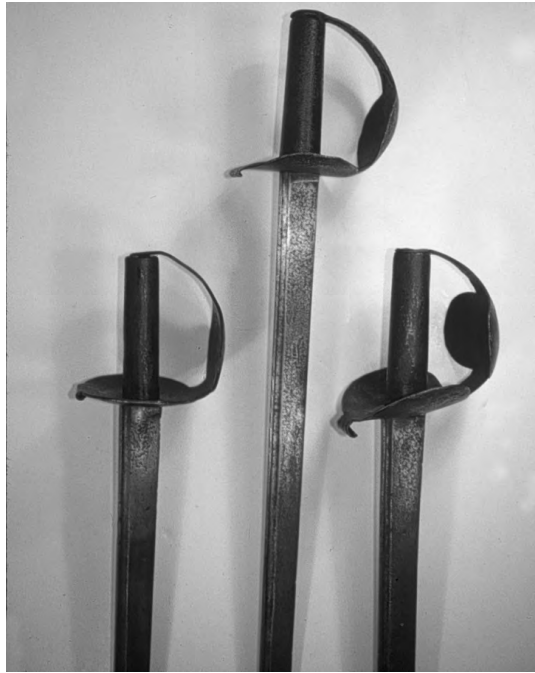


Plate 29. Three early first pattern cutlasses, 1760–1810.

The leather scabbard which was repaired, has four elaborate mounts with raised nautical motifs on both sides of all mounts except the bottom. These motifs are identical on both sides of each mount. The top two mounts have dolphin-sea serpent like carrying rings. The top mount has a large elaborate stand of arms with a central plaque of an angel holding a stalk of wheat. The reverse top mount also has the maker's plaque. The second mount has a mast top with arms and a British flag, plaques with Hercules wrestling a lion within a plaque in the center and a clown within a leaf motif below. The third mount has the clown motif within a stand of arms that includes a Roman helmet, and crossed swords and flags. The bottom mount is simply engraved with a floral.

CUTLASSES

Officers in the Royal Navy were required to purchase their own swords and dirks. However, the cutlass was the seaman's weapon and it was contracted and purchased by the Ordnance Board, a separate government department that purchased weapons for both the Army and the Navy. With peak strength of about 145,000 seamen about midway through the three French Wars (1793–1815), the demand for cutlasses was considerable.

Hollier²⁹ introduced the double disk cutlass, with stag handles, to the Royal Navy as early as 1730. An example of one of Hollier's earlier cutlasses has been illustrated³⁰ elsewhere. This section generally describes the regulation cutlasses through about 1860.

First Pattern

The more prevalent iron hilt model was introduced in the mid-1700s and continued in use until the early 1800s

when the model 1804 was introduced. The Ordnance Board purchased these early cutlasses and after about 1788, they had viewers or inspectors marks consisting of a crown over a number.³¹ Some research with cutlasses having viewer's marks and manufacturers names also enables one to generally identify the supplier according to the viewer mark.

Plate 29 shows the hilts for three of these cutlasses. The one on the left is early and without a viewers mark indicating it predates 1788. The blade has a spear point and is 28 1/2 inches long and 1 3/16 inch wide. It is marked with a running fox and *Harvey* on the reverse and a different fox like mark on the British. The iron hilt is solid (no seam), its disks are essentially round, and the turned down quillon is relatively wide. Samuel Harvey Sr. was a Birmingham sword maker that provided cutlasses to the Royal Navy from 1748 to 1778 and his son, Samuel Jr. continued through 1795.³² The absence of viewer marks would indicate that Harvey Sr, made this cutlass.

The middle one is a later version of a similar cutlass. The blade is similar but slightly shorter—27 1/2 inches long and 1 1/4 inch wide. It is marked with a *Crown/4* viewers mark, and a running fox with initials (undecipherable) on the guard. There are also undecipherable marks on the blade tip. The disks are oblong, the iron hilt has a seam, and the turned down quillon is relatively narrow. The viewer's mark indicates this cutlass was supplied by Gill, another Birmingham supplier (1783–1803).³³

A third cutlass, and probably still later version, is shown on the right. This blade is 28 3/8 inches long and 1 5/16 inch wide. It is marked with a *Crown/2* on the ricasso. The disks are elliptical, the iron hilt has a seam, and the turned down quillon is narrow. The hilt is shorter, 4 1/2 inch, than the other two cutlasses illustrated. The viewer's mark indicates this cutlass was probably made by Reddell and Bate (Birmingham—1803).³⁴

Pattern of 1804

A pattern cutlass was first introduced to the Royal Navy in 1804 and a considerably large amount of information on their markings and manufacturers exists.³⁵ One such cutlass, with a rare scabbard, is illustrated on Plate 30. Many cutlasses were supplied under Ordnance Board contracts from 1804 on so these cutlasses are fairly common. This cutlass has a straight 1 1/2 inch wide by 29 inch long blade with a spear point. The grip is hand formed and ribbed. The blade is extensively marked with a *Crown/8* (Osborn or Tatham & Egg³⁶) on the obverse, a large (3/4 inch) crown over a Georgian cypher on the reverse, and the manufacturer's name *W. Colley* on the spine.

The pattern 1804 remained the Royal Navy standard until 1845 despite the continuing reviews by the Board of



Plate 30. Pattern 1804 cutlass by W. Coffey with rare scabbard.

Ordnance. About 1814, the Ordnance Board considered another version of the pattern 1804 with a shorter curved blade. Tatham and Egg was contracted for this new configuration. This configuration, which was never adopted, has also been illustrated.³⁷

Variant

Plate 31 shows another British cutlass that may have come either before or after the pattern 1804. It has a wide (1 1/2 inch) shorter (26 1/2 inch) slightly curved blade with unstopped fuller. The grip is an iron cylinder and the crude guard is a single shell that widens from the pommel. This grip and the guard attachment is similar to the pre-1804 pat-



Plate 31. Variant cutlass with Georgian cypher by HG&H.



Plate 32. Pattern 1845 cutlass.

terns but the blade conforms to what is referred to as the 1814 version. The blade markings include a large Georgian cypher and *HG&H* on the obverse. The author did not find this mark in the standard references.

Pattern of 1845

The 1845 Pattern cutlass with scabbard and frog is shown on Plate 32. This cutlass is markedly different from the pattern 1804 eliminating the double disks in favor of a very large hand guard. It is also much heavier. This cutlass



Plate 33. Pattern 1859 Enfield cutlass-bayonet.

has a slightly curved blade with a spear point that is 1 1/2 inch-wide and 28 1/2 inch long.

Pattern of 1859

The last Royal Navy cutlass during the period of interest was designed as a sword bayonet for the short Enfield naval rifle. It is referred to as the pattern 1859 cutlass bayonet and is illustrated on Plate 33. It is iron mounted and has a 27 inch long by 1 1/2 inch wide slightly curved blade with a spear point. This particular cutlass has a Solingen knight's head stamp indicating manufacture by Weyersberg. This pattern cutlass was also imported for use by the Confederate States Navy and was marked specifically for their use.

DIRKS

Naval forces began to use dirks in the mid to late 1700s. Historians differ on whether dirks originated with the Danish Navy or the Royal Navy but they were widely used by England's sea service. During the period 1780 to 1820, the officer/midshipmen strength of the Royal Navy varied from about 3,500 to 6,000 and many dirks have survived. Despite the popular notion that Midshipmen only used dirks, early paintings show dirks worn by high-ranking naval officers as well as Midshipmen. Some typical representative naval dirks with designs consistent with navy use are discussed below.

Initially, these weapons had relatively long straight slender blades with central fullers and typically had ivory or bone grips with mountings in brass or copper for sea service. Dirk blades were designed for thrusting and supple-



Plate 34. Three fighting dirks, c1800.



Plate 35. Two small dress dirks, 1810-1830.

mented an officer's sword during boarding. Scabbards for these early dirks were leather with brass mounts and few remain intact.

Fighting Dirks

Plate 34 illustrates three typical fighting dirks. They all have pillow pommels with simple mountings and blades suitable for thrusting. The maker for the dirk on the left is unknown but it has the classic long (14 inches) slender (1/2 inch wide) blade with central fuller, simple tapered ivory grip with a brass pommel and ferrule, and a reverse quillon guard. Its scabbard is brass-mounted leather. The middle dirk was made by Francis Thurkle and bears his [FT] cartouche under the guard. It is a larger version of the one to its left with a 16 inch long by 3/4 inch wide single fullered slender blade. Its scabbard is also brass-mounted leather. The right dirk is a slightly different fighting configuration but is so simple it had to be designed for this purpose. Since it is iron mounted it probably not made for sea service. The double-edged blade is 1 1/4 inch wide and 12 1/2 inches long. The ebony ribbed grip has a flat pommel, simple ferrule and reverse quillon guard. The blade is marked as being made by Mayfield of Dublin (c1800).³⁸

Toward the end of the 18th Century, dirks began to be worn by Naval Officers and Midshipmen on dress occasions in lieu of swords. Sizes varied from about 8 to 26 inches overall. These dirks were relatively fancy compared to those used for fighting. They were both brass and silver mounted with elaborate hilts and engraved brass or leather scabbards. Blades were typically double edged with a flattened diamond shape and ornately etched. Blue and gilt etching was also popular and some of the most ornate dirks were made during the early 1800s.



Plate 36. Four larger scale dress dirks, 1810-1830.

Dress Dirks

Two relatively small dress dirks with straight blades are pictured on Plate 35. The top dirk has a 6 inch long by 9/16 inch wide double-edged diamond shaped blade. It is blue and gilded over about three fourths of its length with floral designs and a stand of arms. The turned ivory grip has a simple turned brass pommel and ferrule. The cross guard is an oval with jeweled beads around its periphery set in a pebbled surface. The scabbard has two ring mounts and is engraved with floral designs on both sides. The maker's name: *Rich'd Clarke & Sons/62 Cheapside/London* is engraved on the reverse. Clarke & Sons was at 62 Cheapside from 1796 to 1829 and is listed as a silversmith and jeweler through 1807 and a goldsmith and jeweler through 1829.³⁹

The lower dirk has a 7 1/4 inch long by 3/4 inch wide flattened diamond section blue and gilded blade. The gilded motifs are floral designs. The relatively ornate grip is square and tapered ivory that is diagonally wrapped with a double strand of twisted gilt wire. The square pommel has a small lion's mask engraved on a finely chased basket weave background. The ferrule has an engraved Greek key band at its center. The cross guard consists of two sets of different sized crosshatched rectangles with leaves at their intersections. The two-ring brass scabbard is engraved on both sides over its entire length with a blank owner's nameplate on the reverse. Neither of these dirks have any naval motifs on their blades or scabbards.

Four slightly larger dress dirks with straight blades and round grips and pommels are shown on Plate 36. The dirk on the far left has a turned ivory grip with a three mount

leather scabbard. It has a 9 1/4 inch long by 3/4 inch wide flattened diamond section frosted bright-etched blade with floral designs and acorn and leaf motifs. The ribbed ivory grip has a flattened ivory pommel, banded ornate brass ferrule, and a circular cross guard with leaves in relief.

The next dirk has an 8 3/4 inch long by 3/4 inch wide bright-etched blade with generic floral and military motifs. The tapered ivory grip has two bands and an ornate banded brass ferrule. The flattened circular pommel has an ivory lower section and an ornately chased brass pommel cap. The oval cross guard is cutout with leaf motifs and is chased with an eight-pointed star with leaves between on its upper surface. The two-ring ornate brass scabbard is engraved on both sides over its entire length. The obverse motifs include a center panel with a stand of arms with trident flanked by dolphins and leafy spray. The reverse motifs are a blank nameplate and a long symmetrical leafy spray, with two smaller leafy sprays above and below.

The other dirk with the leather scabbard has a tapered octagonal ivory grip with a fluted brass pommel. The pommel is chased around its periphery and has a lion's mask at its top center. The guard is a circular inverted cup with berry and leaf designs around its periphery. The brass ferrule has the same berry and leaf design on a band at its top. The blue and gilded double-edged diamond shaped blade is 7 3/4 inch long and 5/8 inch wide. It is gilt etched with generic floral and military motifs. The leather scabbard has three simple brass mounts with the top two banded.

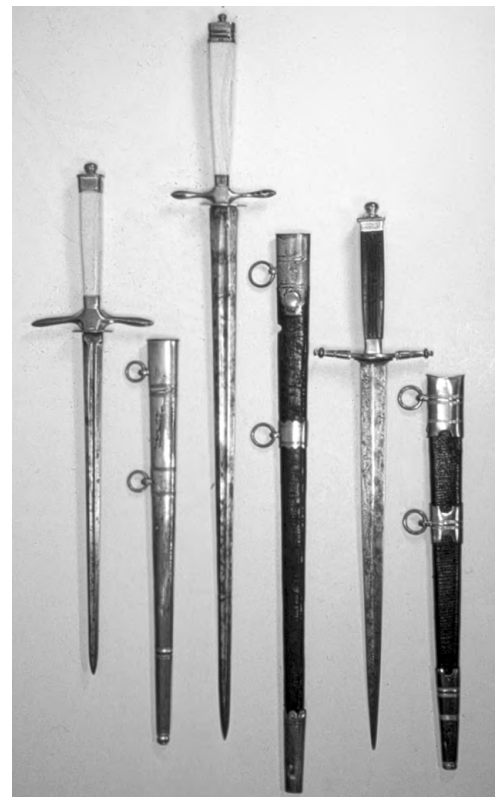


Plate 37. Three pillow pommel dress dirks, c1790-1830.



Plate 38. Silver mounted dirk by William Vincent, c1780.

The dirk on the far right has a simple turned tapered brass/copper grip with large ovoid brass pommel. It has an 8 1/4 inch long by 3/4 inch wide blade bright-etched with leaves and a stand of arms. The small oval cross guard is deeply chased with a raised fouled anchor on a stippled background. The two-ring brass scabbard is simple engraved. Note that only two of these dirks have specific naval motifs in the form of anchors or dolphins and a trident.

Pillow Pommel Dress Dirks

Dirks with pillow pommels and simple cross guards typified the fighting dirks as illustrated in Plate 34 above. As illustrated on Plate 37, this design was extended to both brass and silver mounted dress dirks.

The center dirk is silver mounted but has a single fullered 14 inch long by 3/4 inch wide double-edged blade



Plate 39. Battle of Nile commemorative dirk, c1805.



Plate 40. Large lion head pommel dirk, c1835.

just like the slender bladed fighting dirks on Plate 34 above. This blade is etched with an anchor, leaves and stands of arms. It has a rectangular silver pommel with tapered rectangular ivory grip ending in simple silver ferrule. The cross guard is a simple tapered cross. Below the cross guard there is an oval silver water guard to prevent water from entering the scabbard. The leather scabbard has three silver mounts with a frog attachment on the upper mount. Both the dirk and scabbard have silver makers marks indicating the dirk was made in 1799 to 1800. The maker's initials appear to be *JJ* but no maker was found with these initials.

The dirk on the right has a 9 inch long by 1/2 inch wide flattened diamond section blade with a central fuller almost to its tip and traces of blue and gilt. it has a smooth tapered rectangular ivory grip with pillow pommel, simple



Plate 41. Lion head pommel dirk with extreme curved blade, c1805.



Plate 42. Three small dirks with curved blades and unusual configurations.

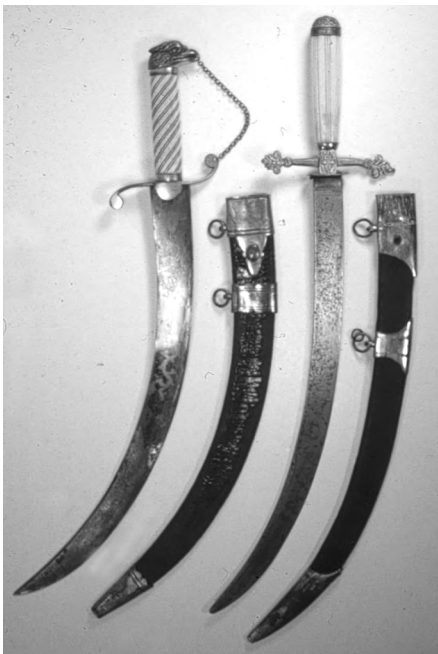


Plate 43. Two larger dirks with unusual configurations.

ferrule, and tapered cross guard identical to the center dirk it also has an oval water guard. The scabbard is simple brass with two rings.

The dirk on the left has a 10 inch long by 5/8 inch wide flattened diamond section etched blade. It has a ribbed and tapered rectangular ebony grip with square pillow pommel, and simple ferrule. The brass cross guard terminates in cannon barrels attached to an oval centerpiece. The leather scabbard has three simple brass mounts.

The dirk on Plate 38 is silver mounted but has no scabbard. The blade is 10 1/2 inches long by 1 inch wide and



Plate 44. Bird's head pommel dirk with tri-colored blade, c1825.

may have been longer than shown. It has a smooth tapered rectangular ivory grip with silver stepped pillow pommel, and simple silver ferrule. The cross guard is relatively ornate with leaf designs at its ends and large lions masks below. It is marked *WV* for William Vincent, a London silversmith in the last quarter of the 18th century.⁴⁰

Lion Head Pommel Dirks

Naval engagements in the West Indies, the Barbary Coast and African campaigns led to adaptation of dirks with curved blades after about 1805. The use of lion head pommels with reverse quillon cross guards with chains was apparently a very popular design based on the number of these dirks surviving. Plates 39 and 40 illustrate several relatively large lion head pommel-curved dirks are described below.

The dirk shown on Plate 39 commemorates the Nile campaign as indicated by the crocodile within its cross guard. At 19 inches long and by 1 inch wide the blue and gilded curved (1 1/2 inch curvature) blade is relatively long. The carved hand formed ivory grip has a lion head pommel and engraved ferrule. The ornate cross guard has reverse quillons, with the chain guard missing, and an inset crocodile. The leather scabbard has three simple brass mounts.

The dirk shown on Plate 40 is much later than the others shown, c1835, and is identified. It has an 18 inch long by 1 1/8 inch wide frosted curved blade with long deep top fuller etched with floral and geometric designs and stands of arms. The hand formed ivory grip has a lion's ferrule. The cross guard has reverse quillons and simple langets. Its two-mount leather scabbard with frog stud has the owner's initials on the top mount.

The Plate 41 dirk has no scabbard but illustrates the extent to which these blades were curved: 2 1/4 inches over its 16 inch length. The blade is 1 1/4 inch wide and was originally blue and gilded. The grip is classic hand formed carved ivory with a single twisted wire wrap and lion head pommel. The cross guard has reverse quillons and it had a chain knuckle-bow.

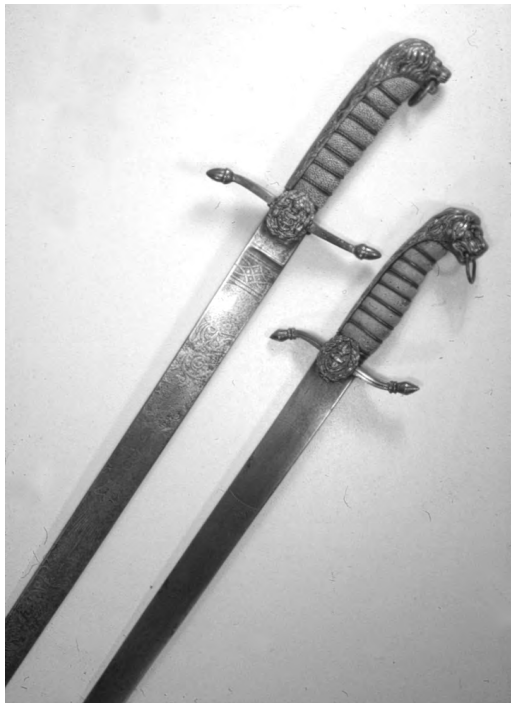


Plate 45. Regulation lion pommel dirks, c1900.

Unusual Dirks

The dirks described above are typical of what was used during the 1780-1835 time frame and represent typical patterns. There were also some less frequently seen unusual dirks used in this same time frame.

Plate 42 shows three unusual dirks with curved blades. The dirk on the left has a 3/4 inch wide by 8 1/4 inch long curved blue and gilded blade etched with generic military and floral motifs. The grip is turned brass with a large round brass pommel. The cross guard is unique in its exaggerated width and the leaves and acorns in deep relief. It has a two ring plain brass scabbard with drag that has a throat attached by screws.

The center dirk that has a pistol shaped ivory grip carved with a series of diagonals, a clamshell, and horizontal lines. The ferrule is banded brass and the guard has chased acorn and oak leaf motifs on its top surface. The blue and gilded curved blade has a 14 1/2 inch long and 1 1/8 inch wide blued and gilt curved blade with a 4 inch false edge. Gilded blade motifs include stands of arms with nautical symbols, acorns and oak leaves, and an anchor. The ivory grip is ribbed with an ornately engraved brass pommel and simple ferrule. The cross guard has a central engraved rectangle terminating in large acanthus leaves with a small oval guard below. The brass scabbard, with single carrying ring, is engraved with a large anchor and floral designs. A chain used as a knuckle-bow is missing. The leather scabbard has three simple brass mounts with the top mount missing its frog stud.

The dirk on the right has an 8 inch long by 5/8 inch wide curved blade etched with generic military and floral

motifs. The ornately carved ivory grip with a clamshell motif is also the pommel. The brass ferrule has pressed grapes with leaves and the cross guard has a central acorn with two oak leaves in relief. The leather scabbard has three simple brass mounts banded with incised perimeter lines.

Two other dirks with unusual dirk configurations are shown on Plate 43. The dirk on the left has a tapered and ribbed ivory grip with brass pommel chased with oak leaves and a simple brass ferrule. The cross guard has a center block with a raised floral and oak leaf quillons. The once blue and gilded curved blade is 14 3/4 inch long by 7/8 inch wide. It once had generic military and floral motifs. The leather scabbard has three simple brass mounts with the top mount missing a frog stud.

The other dirk has an eagle pommel that, without the blade motifs, could easily pass as American. It has a 15 inch long by 1 1/4 inch wide slightly curved blade with a 5 1/4 inch false edge. the blue and gilt blade has generic military motifs on both sides over about half its length. However, the obverse side as the Royal Coat of Arms and the reverse side has the Georgian crown and cypher. The grip is made of diagonally ribbed ivory and ends with a simple brass ferrule. It does not appear to have had a copper wire wrap. It has a chain knuckle bow and the straight guard has unadorned langets and simple reverse finials. The leather scabbard has three simple brass mounts with two rings and a frog stud on the top mount. This dirk dates from 1805 to 1820.

The dirk on Plate 44 illustrates the fine workmanship that can be found on dirks. The bird's head pommel with capstan rivet is chased with floral and flower designs and the hand formed and horizontally ribbed ivory grip ends with a banded brass ferrule. The cross guard has reverse ball quillons and its top surface and edges are deeply chased with leaf and floral designs. The 15 inch long, 1 1/8 inch wide, blade is tri-colored over about 10 1/2 inches. The motifs include floral designs with stands of arms that consist of banners and pikes on the reverse, and an anchor, cannon, and British flag on the obverse. The brass scabbard, with separate throat, is engraved to simulate three mounts on both sides. The top mount motif is a stand of arms, the middle mount motif is a starburst, and the lower mount motif is a coiled serpent with partial sunburst below.

Regulation Dirks

The regulations of 1825 prohibited the wearing of dirks by Midshipmen but in 1856 they were prescribed for both officers and midshipmen.⁴¹ The pattern 1856 dirks had lion head pommels, white fish skin grips, and simple cross guards with reverse acorn quillons. The straight acid etched blades were 1 1/8 inch wide by 13 1/2 inch long. Some had wider blades that were 12 inch long and 1 3/8 inch wide.

Similar dirks with longer blades were prescribed again in 1879 and in 1901. Plate 45 shows a comparison of two of these turn-of-the century dirks. The dirk on the left is a Regulation 1879 midshipman's dirk with a 17 inch long by 1 3/8 inch wide blade and a 4 1/2 inch hilt and turned down quillons. The blade is etched with a Georgian crown over VR cypher and a fouled anchor.

The one on the right is very similar and represents a later version of the same pattern. It has an 18-long by 1 1/4 inch wide blade with a 5 inch hilt and relatively straight quillons. The blade has the same etchings as the one above; however, its obverse is etched: *Highbatt/Outfitter/Gosport* (1855-1905).⁴² This dirk has a slightly different lion head and quillons plus a spring loaded reverse guard to secure the dirk in its scabbard. These regulation pattern dirks were as poorly suited for combat as the earlier dress dirks.

ENDNOTES

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33. Ibid, p 317
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35. May and Annis, Volume 1, pp 78-80
36. May and Annis, Volume 2, pp 320-335
37. Gilkerson, Plate G, p 84
38. Ibid, p 331
39. Ibid, p 273
40. Pickford, p 82
41. May and Annis, Volume 1, p 76
42. May and Annis, Volume 2, p 281

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