

‘A DESPERAT WEPON’: RE-HAFTED SCYTHES AT SEDGEMOOR, IN WARFARE AND AT THE TOWER OF LONDON

Edward Impey, FSA

Edward Impey, Royal Armouries Museum, Armouries Drive, Leeds LS10 1LT.
Email: edward.impey@armouries.org.uk

The Royal Armouries possesses two scythe blades of pre-mechanised manufacture, mounted axially on straight hafts to form weapons. An inventory of 1686 lists eighty-one scythe blades at the Tower of London (by 1694 described as booty captured from the Duke of Monmouth’s rebels at Sedgemoor) and the surviving pair was probably among them. The Duke’s shortage of standard-issue equipment made improvisation essential, and the choice of re-hafted scythe blades owed to their widespread, well known and effective use by irregular forces in Britain and Europe since the late Middle Ages. Monmouth’s ‘sithmen’, some hundreds strong, took part in skirmishes and in the battle of Sedgemoor itself. Of interest to the Tower authorities as curiosities and for their propaganda value, the scythe blades were displayed, in diminishing numbers, from the seventeenth until the nineteenth century, and these two until the 1990s. In the future they will be displayed again, representing Monmouth’s rebels and countless others, and a weapon type that deserves a greater level of study and recognition.

INTRODUCTION

Over recent decades most major museums have published their ‘Hundred Treasures’, ‘Director’s Choice’, or similar items in the genre. The Royal Armouries, which published *Treasures from the Tower of London* to accompany an exhibition in 1982 and is soon to produce a similar title, is no exception.¹ Selecting the ‘treasures’ was an interesting process, highlighting the variety of reasons for which an item might make the grade. In the case of the Royal Armouries, the parlance of heritage management was borrowed to assess the degree to which an asset might possess an agreed set of ‘values’ that, when added up, could quantify that asset’s overall ‘significance’.² These values go beyond the obvious typological, technological and artistic attributes of an object (or class of objects) to embrace those derived from that object’s association with past events and people, its impact on history and society, and its importance to particular communities or causes. Such objects may therefore have few intrinsic qualities as artefacts, while having a significance rooted in

1. Norman and Wilson 1982.

2. See, for example, Drury and McPherson 2008.

(a)



(b)



Fig 1. The Royal Armouries scythe blades, (a) VII.960 and (b) VII.961, showing the top ends of their (more recent) hafts. Photographs: © Royal Armouries.

broad or particular aspects of history, human endeavour or experience in which they played a part or whose nature they illustrate.

Firmly in this category are the Royal Armouries' two worn and battered scythe blades (fig 1), adapted and re-hafted to form the business ends of staff weapons for the Duke of Monmouth's rebels in 1685, and picked up by the victors at Sedgemoor.³ Of plausibly seventeenth-century origin, there is little reason to doubt that these were among the eighty-one 'scith blades' recorded at the Tower in 1686,⁴ and which were, by 1694, described as spoils from the battle.⁵ Crudely improvised, perhaps mere days before their capture, they recall the forlornness of Monmouth's venture, are embedded in the popular image of Sedgemoor and have featured in its representation by artists (fig 2), historians and novelists ever since.⁶ On a broader scale, they recall innumerable encounters in many countries over many centuries, in which desperate men with makeshift arms fought powers and professionals they could rarely hope to beat.

The general aims of this article, therefore, include calling attention to such struggles, parallel to but rarely included in the mainstream study of warfare, and of a specific but widely used weapon type that has received almost no attention from historians of arms

3. RA inventory nos VII.960 and VII.961.

4. TNA: PRO, WO 55/1730, fol 14r.

5. Benthem 1694, 30.

6. See, for example, Ferguson 1887, 232. The best-known artistic representation is Edgar Bundy's painting of 1905: Chamot *et al* 1964, I, 83. Scythes are mentioned in ch 64 ('Slaughter in the Marshes') of *Lorna Doone* (Blackmore 1869), and in *Micah Clarke* (Conan Doyle 1889) in chs 16 ('Of our Coming to Taunton'), 28 ('Of the Fight in Wells Cathedral') and 32 ('Of the Onfall at Sedgemoor'). Oldmixon 1730, 703. Chandler (1995, 159) notes that 'it has been calculated that over 50 novels have been devoted to the subject [of Monmouth's rebellion] over the past 120 years'.



Fig 2. *The Morning of Sedgemoor* (1905) by Edgar Bundy (1862–1922). The upright blade may be based on VII.960 (see fig 1). The artist shows the improvised nature of the weapon, the blade lashed to a crudely dressed sapling. Image: Tate/Digital Image © Tate, London 2014.

and armour;⁷ pursuing the subject, meanwhile, has been encouraged by the renewed interest in Monmouth following the appearance of Anna Keay's 2016 biography,⁸ the objects' brief appearance in a recent exhibition at the Tower⁹ and the discovery of a so-far unpublished account of Sedgemoor, rich in information on the 'sithers', written in 1688–9 by John Taylor, a Royalist volunteer.¹⁰ A critical edition of the text by Professor John Childs, which has done much to inform this article, is published in conjunction with it.¹¹

More specifically, what follows starts with a description of the Royal Armouries' items, their manufacture and date, then examines the quantity and type of Monmouth's conventional armaments, his need to improvise and the methods of procuring and converting the blades, and is followed by some discussion of how the 'sithemen'¹² were deployed in the campaign and at Sedgemoor. The article also briefly examines the military use of re-hafted scythe blades in Britain and Western Europe from the late Middle Ages to the twentieth century and their effectiveness. A final section summarises the history of the storage, display and description of Monmouth's scythes at the Tower of London since 1686.

SCYTHE BLADES AT THE ROYAL ARMOURIES

The Royal Armouries possesses four weapons incorporating scythe blades. Two of these (VII.1745 and VII.2041) were created in the nineteenth century for display purposes and have been on view since 1996 in the Hall of Steel in Leeds.¹³ These relate only loosely to this article, which centres on the other two: VII.960 and VII.961.

The first is a complete 'crown' blade, forged from a bar of wrought iron with a cutting edge of steel¹⁴ (as opposed to the riveted or 'patent' form introduced in the

7. Essentially: Borg 1976, 332–52 (at 349–50), Pl XCIII (blade); Kirk 1988, 7; Black 1990, 41.

8. Keay 2016.

9. 'Curiosities of the Tower', April–September 2016, curated by Bridget Clifford.

10. National Library of Jamaica, MS 105, 81–97. On Taylor, and the creation and date of the MS, see Buisseret 2008, xi–xxiii.

11. The edition covers pp 81–97. See the [Supplementary Material](#).

12. The contemporary documents spell the word in various ways.

13. RA inventory nos VII.1745 and VII.2041. These are described in the 1864 catalogue of the Museum of Artillery at the Rotunda, Woolwich (Lefroy 1864, 93) as 'Two scythe blades fixed to ash poles in imitation of the weapon of the Polish Insurgents of 1862–3'. The catalogues of 1874 (p 122) and 1963 (Kaestlin 1963, 47) use exactly the same words. The explanation seems entirely credible, as the plight of the Poles from 1861 excited intense political and popular interest in England (Wereszycki 1935, 80–1, 86, 96–7, 105–6). VII.1745 is stamped 'W.TY', and so made by the Sheffield company William Tyzack and Sons, established in 1812; VII. 2041 has a part-effected or part-surviving stamp that may represent the 'z' of the same name. The scythes are not listed in the Rotunda catalogue of 1822 (Anon 1822). They were transferred to the Tower Armouries in 1979 (RA Cat entry).

14. Inventory description: 'War scythe, English, 17th century VII.960 (Loc: Tower of London: Middle Flint) The tang straightened and set into a modern wooden haft. Near the tang is stamped an unidentified makers mark. Blade length: (of head): 39 in. Prov.: Old Tower Collection/Tower Arsenal?; Said to have been taken from Monmouth's troops in 1687.' Ffoulkes (1916, vol 2, 244) describes the items simply as 'Scythe Blades, taken from Monmouth's troops in 1685', referring the reader (in n 1) to the entry at p 54 under the year 1687, re a sale of armour 'taken from disaffected persons'.

1790s)¹⁵ and stiffened by an integral square-sectioned ridge or 'chine' at the rear of the upper side. It measures 97cm from tip to heel, and 6cm across at its approximate centre. Close to the heel is a hole to take the wire or 'grass nail' linking the blade to the snath (handle), which adds rigidity to the whole and prevents cut stems bunching up between the heel and the blade, and a second hole with the same function accompanies it, 3cm closer to the blade edge and 2cm closer to the tip. Beneath the hole is a letter composed of four punched marks, accompanied by a horizontal line, probably identifying it as a 'W' not an 'M'. The worn and irregular profile of the blade's edge indicates heavy use before re-hafting and, while at the Tower, it has been given at least one coat of black paint. The tang – originally at right-angles to the blade – has been bent to become axial to it and is socketed into a drilled hole at the end of the haft. Clearly fitted for display purposes after the loss of the original, the haft is 160cm long and 35mm in diameter, is of turned ash, stained and painted, and formerly belonged to another weapon, probably a naval boarding pike.¹⁶

The blade of the second weapon, VII.961,¹⁷ also of crown form, is 73cm long and 78mm wide, although missing its heel and tang. This has the same type of chine as VII.960, although extending closer to the tip, and is fixed by two nails into a 10cm-long slit in the haft, itself 186cm long, of turned ash, 33mm in diameter and stained to a dark mahogany colour. This too is re-used, and has a shoe in the form of a slightly tapering brass cylinder.

The form of the blades is important in considering their Sedgemoor credentials, otherwise based on circumstantial documentary evidence and tradition: while there is no established typology of English scythes, it seems that while Roman and early medieval blades were wedge-shaped in section, like a kitchen knife,¹⁸ from at least the twelfth century they could be thinner but reinforced with a raised ridge or 'chine' at the rear;¹⁹ by the nineteenth century the chine was being made flush with the upper surface of the blade but divided from it by a channel or 'fuller', together called the 'whale'. This arrangement persisted in England, alongside the riveted variant, until production ceased in the 1980s; the widely used but shorter and heavier 'Austrian' scythe, still made today, is of similar form.²⁰ That the Armouries blades belong to the intermediate type is therefore consistent with, and may be said to support, the simplest interpretation of their provenance – that they were indeed picked up from the battlefield. As for their manufacture, being of a form that could be produced by any blacksmith suggests a local, West Country origin; if not, they might

15. The author is grateful to Peter Smithurst for abundant information on the manufacture of scythe blades and its history, and on these two items. For details on the making of crown scythes, see Cope 1989, 7–9.

16. Bridget Clifford, pers comm 17 June 2019.

17. The RA catalogue entry reads: 'War scythe, English, 17th century VII.961 (Loc: Tower of London: Middle Flint) Scythe blade with slightly concave single edge and inward turn to back edge. The blade is blackened. Tang straightened and set into a modern wooden haft and held by two nails. The haft ends in a brass shoe, a plain tube with no lower end. The haft may have had a terminal spike. Near the tang is stamped an unidentified makers mark. Blade length: (of head): 730mm (28¾ in.) Prov: Old Tower Collection/ Tower Arsenal?. Said to have been taken from Monmouth's troops in 1687 [sic].'

18. Goodall 2012, 100–1 (F113, F116, F117, F118).

19. <<http://www.hayinart.com/003277.html>> (accessed 20 Sept 2019); Goodall 2012, 100–1 (F113).

20. Notably at the Schröckenfux works at Rossleithen, Austria <<https://scythesupply.com/schr%C3%B6ckenfux-history.html>> (accessed 20 Sept 2019).

have come from specialist water-powered workshops in Worcestershire or Sheffield, active since the fourteenth century, but whether their products had reached Somerset by the 1680s is unknown.²¹

MONMOUTH'S WEAPONS

The story of James, Duke of Monmouth (1649–85) and his rebellion has been told many times.²² For present purposes it is enough to recall that he was the illegitimate but protestant son of Charles II and Lucy Walter, and was persuaded by a number of disaffected parties in the spring of 1685, while in exile in Holland, to rebel against his newly succeeded and catholic uncle, James II.²³ Monmouth landed at Lyme Regis on 11 June 1685²⁴ with a supply of arms and armour borne by two small cargo vessels (one ‘commanded’ by Mr James Hayes)²⁵ and eighty-two men, mostly aboard the *Helderenberg*, a 32-gun fifth-rate under Cornelius Abraham van Brakell.²⁶ Attracting at his high point up to 7,000 recruits,²⁷ the duke scored some initial successes, but the rebels were crushingly defeated by the royal army at Sedgemoor on 6 July and the duke was captured forty-eight hours later.²⁸ He was executed on Tower Hill on 15 July, about 320 of his followers elsewhere,²⁹ and a further 850 were transported during and after the Bloody Assizes.³⁰

While it is often said that the rebellion was foredoomed, Monmouth had some gifts as a leader, a good military record³¹ and had previously, as Captain General of the Army in 1679, prepared at least one detailed and costed list of equipment for a seaborne expeditionary force.³² As such, although short of time and money, he took an informed interest in munitions and supplies, exercised through the agency of Nathaniel Wade, a Bristol lawyer-turned-soldier.³³ According to Wade, in May 1685, the duke went to Rotterdam to raise money and

in the meantime left orders . . . to provide two small ships and about 1500 foot arms, 1500 Curasses, 4 Pieces of Artillery mounted on field carriages, 200 as I take it barrels of Gunpowder with some small quantity of Granado shells match and other things necessary for the undertaking . . . ³⁴

21. Rowlands 1975, 30–2; Cope 1989, 1; Hey 1990, 351, 359–62.

22. Keay 2016, 1.

23. Clifton 1984, 150–2, 291; Keay 2016, 333–9.

24. This date and all others are given in Old Style, that is, as recorded at the time, according to the Julian calendar. To convert to New Style (Gregorian), add ten days.

25. BL, Harley 6845, fol 274r: ‘Mr Hayes who commanded the ship of burden’ (Wade’s Further Information).

26. See Keay (2016, 340) for context and references. The main sources relating to the ships are the ‘Anonymous account’ (reproduced in Chandler 1995, 118: ‘We had in all three ships; that of 32 guns carried most of our men, the other two were for our ammunition’) and ‘Wade’s Narrative’ (reproduced in full in Macdonald Wigfield 1980, 160; BL, Harley 6845, fol 272r). See also Childs 2014, 68. Regarding the identity of the captain, see the Supplementary Material, n 23; Childs, pers. comm. 16 Apr 2019.

27. Tincey 2005, 33–4.

28. Keay 2016, 366.

29. For number executed, Macaulay (1858, vol 1, 45) gives 320.

30. Parry 1929, 263, citing and endorsing Roberts 1844, 261; Chandler 1995, 88–9.

31. Clifton 1984, 93–4, 285–6; Tincey 2005, 13–15; Keay 2016, 92–3, 124–9, 142–5.

32. Sainsbury and Fortescue 1896, 252 (item 700), 255–6 (item 715), 314–6 (item 862).

33. MacDonald Wigfield 1980, 26; Zook 2004.

34. Ibid.

The two ships and material were 'provided' at a cost of 'near £3000' – presumably purchased – although the crews were Dutch;³⁵ the use of the *Helderenberg*, chartered after learning that 'several of the King's men of war were on the Coast', cost Monmouth an additional sum of about £2,500.³⁶ The small ships were subsequently captured off Lyme on 20 June by Captain Richard Trevanion RN of the *Saudadoes*,³⁷ and the *Helderenberg* seized at St Ives, en route for Spain, probably on 29 or 30 June.³⁸ She was commissioned into the Royal Navy in 1686, but sank two years later after a collision.³⁹

A second account of the equipment procured in Holland, by Lord Grey, Monmouth's co-conspirator and cavalry commander, appeared in his *Secret History of the Rye House Plot and Monmouth's Rebellion*, written in 1685 at the king's request, although published only in 1754.⁴⁰ According to this the

preparations . . . were as follows, 1460 suits of defensive arms; 100 musquets and bandaliers; 500 pikes; as many swords; 250 barrels of powder, besides what was provided for the frigate; a small number of double carabins and pistols, the quantity of them I cannot remember: our frigate carried two and thirty guns, and we had besides four small field-pieces.⁴¹

The lists are, with one proviso, usefully complementary. Wade's account can be taken to mean that foot arms were bought for 1,500 infantry, while the 1,500 'Curasses' – by 1685 long discarded by pikemen and hardly ever worn by musketeers – were intended for cavalry, who then still wore breast, back and pot⁴² (known then and now as 'harquebusiers' armour'), as Monmouth and Grey did themselves.⁴³ The deposition of Mr Williams of

35. *Ibid.*, 159; BL, Harley 6845, fol 272v: 'besides Dutch seamen'.

36. Wade cites the cost of the two ships and arms at 'near £3000': MacDonald Wigfield 1980, 159; BL, Harley 6845, fol 271v; he then states that the whole 'equipage' as it set to sea 'cost near £5500 as I remember' (*Ibid.*, 160; BL, Harley 6845, fol 272r) the difference presumably being the cost of hiring the warship and its fitting out.

37. BL, Add MS 31,956, 3; the date in the MS is 20 June. Reproduced Chandler 1995, 125. See also Charnock 1794–6, vol 1, 273–4. Charnock's account has Trevanion capturing 'two small ships of war, the naval force assisting in that expedition, and two transports on which he found forty barrels of powder'.

38. John Childs, pers comm 18 Oct 2018, citing *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 1685, 243. See also Timings 1960–72, 1, 243.

39. Winfield 2009, 166; 'British Fifth Rate ship 'Helderenberg' (1685)' <https://threedecks.org/index.php?display_type=show_ship&id=4689> (accessed 23 Sept 2019); see Supplementary Material, n 23.

40. Grey 1754. That it was written at the King's request is stated at page v. The manuscript does not survive.

41. *Ibid.*, 119.

42. In 1685 the *Regulations for Musters* of 1663, specifying the horseman's back, breast and pot, were still in force: Tincey 2005, 21 with sources.

43. The sources for Monmouth's wearing of armour at Sedgemoor are James II's account of the battle: Chandler 1995, 117; BL, Harley 6845, fols 289r–296r, at fol 295r, 'he put of his armes'. The Stopford Sackville papers (HMC 1904, vol 1, 19) state that 'But finding himself disappointed, and their horse routed, both my Lord Gray and he stript themselves of their armour in tyme and fled'. The 'Examination of Mr Williams', 16 Jul 1685 (BL, Lansdowne 1152, fol 237) mentions the duke 'disarming'. Francis Grose (1786, v and pl 11, figs 3 and 4, xvii and pl 45) mentions and illustrates 'The helmet to a suit of armour said to have belonged to the Duke of Monmouth' and 'A suit of armour said to have belonged to the Duke Of Monmouth'. The helmet is of Zischägge form, most widely used in the mid-17th century,

16 July 1685 helps to confirm this in mentioning the '1500 horse arms' acquired in Amsterdam.⁴⁴ Some of this material also seems to have been taken to the Tower of London after Sedgemoor, from where it was committed to auction on 8 April 1717, comprising 602 'Backs with culetts', 529 backs without culetts, 1,085 'Potts' and 910 'Breasts repair'd',⁴⁵ that is, a large but mismatched assemblage of 1,131 backs, 1,085 helmets and 910 breastplates. The number is comfortably within Wade's 1,500, although the armours as sold must have been mixed with others, as Monmouth's harquebusier's equipment would not have included culetts, which were components of 'cuirassier' harness and long obsolete by 1685; possibly the Board of Ordnance batched all this material together in the hope that a Monmouth connection might enhance its value.

How much of the imported armour was actually used is another issue; as we know that only '300 horse'⁴⁶ marched out of Lyme, and given that carts were in short supply, most of it was probably left behind. The report by the Royalist gunner Edward Dummer that, on arrival at Lyme on 20 June, he found 'Back and Breast and Head pieces for betwn. 4 & 5000' in the town⁴⁷ supports this, although the mismatch between his figure and Wade's, as well as that of 1717, is best explained as an exaggeration.

Armour, though, was less important than weapons. From Grey's account we learn that the cavalry was supplied with a number of pairs of pistols and carbines (that is, short-barrelled, snaphaunce muskets), and that the foot arms included standard-issue weapons for pikemen (swords and pikes) to the number of 500. Grey's account, however, is at first sight puzzling in noting only 100 muskets, but, as John Tincey has suggested,⁴⁸ it would make much more sense if the figure were a misprint for 1,000 (it appears at the end of the line), in which case Wade's purchase would have equipped 1,500 men according to the standard proportion of 2:1 musketeers to pikemen. This also tallies with the *c.* £3,000 budget, as at a rough estimate the muskets, swords, pikes and armour would have cost about £2,400, leaving a plausible £600 to cover the cannon, cavalry arms and the two smaller ships.⁴⁹ As Wade tells us, this equipment was mostly successfully unloaded, although forty barrels of powder were left behind on the transports:⁵⁰

Our Company was by the Duke divided into 3 parts, 2 thirds whereof were appointed to guard the Avenues of the Towne. The remaining third was to gett the arms & amunition from on board the ships my part of it was to gett the 4 peices

and the armour a late 16th-century cuirassier's harness. The helmet at least belonged to 'Mr Cosway of the Royal Academy' (presumably Richard Cosway RA, 1742–1821). Whether these actually had any Monmouth connection is questionable at best.

44. BL, Lansdowne 1152, fol 237r.

45. TNA: PRO, WO 55/1656, 60. Partly quoted by Ede-Borrett 2004, 35.

46. 'An anonymous account printed in *The Bloody Assizes*, reproduced in Chandler 1995, 119.

47. BL, Add MS 31,956, 3; the date in the MS is 20 June. Reproduced in Chandler 1995, 125.

48. Tincey 2005, 31.

49. Grose cites prices for Civil War period muskets @ 15s 6d (1786, 110), pikes @ £4 6s 6d (1786, 109; corrected to 4s 6d in the 1801 edn) and 'Footmans' armour (breast, back, tassets, helmet, gorget) @ £1 2s (1786, 109). Walton (1894, 357) gives the 1691 price of a foot sword at 4s 6d and 7s 6d, and of a Pikeman's sword in 1697 at 5s (1894, 808). Everett-Green (1864, vol 29, 23–31 Jan 1661, item 26 (25 Jan)) prices muskets at 16s 6d and pikes at 4s 6d apiece. Scott (2015, 191) gives the price of a foot sword in 1696 at 5s, of back, breast and pot in the 1640s at 14s 6d and of a pike in 1657 at 3s 6d.

50. Charnock 1794–6, vol 1, 273–4. Charnock's account has Trevanion capturing 'two transports on which he found forty barrels of powder'.

of Canon on shoare and see them mounted which I performed by break of day having good assistance of mariners and townsmen.⁵¹

Additional muskets and powder were seized in Lyme, on the day of landing, from the town arsenal.⁵² The cannon were probably three-pounder 'minions',⁵³ although as shot have been found on the battlefield of 11b 8oz and 12oz⁵⁴ (the second of which would have fitted a 1½ inch 'robinet'⁵⁵), which could not have been fired by the other side, they may have been of mixed gauges.

The expectation was, however, that the recruits to Monmouth's army would themselves provide far more weapons than he could bring, as Monmouth had been assured by his unreliable accomplice John Wildman and the spy Robert Cragg earlier in the year.⁵⁶ But this was not to be, largely thanks to the absence of gentry volunteers. Nevertheless, other means of acquiring conventional weapons enjoyed some success. On at least one occasion (25 June) equipment was taken from the Somerset militia, whose retreat, Wade tells us, 'was little better than a flight, many of the souldiers coats and arms being recovered & brought in to us'.⁵⁷ Mr Williams's deposition of 16 July 1685 mentions that 'severall of the militia of dorset and somerset came in with their arms',⁵⁸ and other militia weapons were seized from their stores, as at Taunton on 18 June.⁵⁹ Arms were also seized from ordinary houses, as revealed for example at the trial of Matthew Bragge, who had led a party to a catholic household for this purpose.⁶⁰ Great houses, likely to house sporting guns and sometimes militia equipment, might have offered richer pickings, but these seem to have attracted little more than threats, and on only one recorded occasion, on 14 June, Thomas Allen, steward at Longleat, reported to Lord Weymouth his fears of 'a summons for horses and armes', and that John Kidd, a former estate servant,⁶¹ knowing 'what armes were heretofore in the house . . . will break down your house to find them and may be fire it'. In the event Kidd stayed away and Longleat was spared the loss of the '13 case of pistols

51. MacDonald Wigfield 1980, 62; BL, Harley 6845, fol 274v.

52. Clifton 1984, 159.

53. Nick Hall, pers comm Aug 2017.

54. Chandler (1995, 28) lists the royal artillery in the Tower train as two 12-pounders, four demiculverins (8-pounders), six 6-pounders, four sakers (also 6-pounders), and two minions (3-pounders); the Portsmouth train consisted of four 3-pounders and four falcons (2½ pounders). Ede-Borrett (2017, 129–30) points out the mismatch.

55. Nick Hall, pers comm Jun 2018.

56. MacDonald Wigfield 1980, 160; BL, Harley 6845, fol 271v. Wildman assured Monmouth's messenger that 'the People were well armed': see Supplementary Material.

57. See Macdonald Wigfield 1980, 41, 165; BL, Harley 6845, 277v.

58. BL, Lansdowne 1152, fol 243v.

59. As noted by the Rev. Thomas Axe, resident minister of St Mary Magdalene's, Taunton, on the departure of the militia on 28 June, the townsmen broke into the church and seized arms, which they placed in the tower for safekeeping: Little 1965, 112. Roberts (1844, 299 and note) adds that 'The floor between the belfry and the bells was, it is supposed, used as a storeroom for the arms'. Axe's status was as resident minister for Walter Harte, vicar of Taunton, from 1683 to 1691. The church tower was totally rebuilt in 1858–62.

60. Parry 1929, 238.

61. The Earl of Pembroke described him as 'Mr. Thin's keeper': the Stopford Sackville papers, Pembroke to James II, July 1685 (HMC 1904, vol 1, 20). This suggests a senior household official, not a gamekeeper, as some have stated. Kidd had sailed with Monmouth from Holland (MacDonald Wigfield 1980, 30–1).

... 9 muskets, some old birding pieces, 36 pikes, 30 halberds, and 3 suits of armor' to be found there.⁶²

On 3 July, at Bridgwater, it seems Monmouth was offered (bizarrely, by none other than the brother of the Master Gunner of England) 'a Machine, which would discharge many Barrels of Musquets at once ... to be play'd at several Passes [ie in defence of the town] instead of Cannon', that is, an 'organ gun', a row of musket barrels fixed to a frame and which could be fired almost simultaneously.⁶³ Monmouth refused the offer, but may yet have had one, if not used at Sedgemoor, as the Tower inventory of 1692–3 lists an 'Engine of 12 Musq't Barrells: taken from the late Duke of Monmouth', valued at £3.⁶⁴

The fact remained, however, that Monmouth was woefully short of proper weapons. The rebel author of the 'Anonymous Account' of 1689, probably Colonel Venner,⁶⁵ lamented that the duke's decision not to engage Albemarle and the Devon Militia on 14 June 'in the end proved fatal to us, for had we but followed them we had had all their arms', they would have driven all before them and been at Exeter in two days.⁶⁶ Andrew Paschall, the loyalist and politically minded rector of Chedzoy, observed that 'on Sunday 21 June, he [Monmouth] marched into Bridgwater with about 5,000 men – armed about 4,000, unarmed about 1,000'.⁶⁷ It was observed of Monmouth's troops by Sir Thomas Bridges on 28 June that of 'his men some [were] well armed, others indifferent, some not at all, only having an old sword or a sticke in their hande'.⁶⁸ The 'Anonymous Account' also notes that on the approach to Bridgwater (21 June) 'we were now between four and five thousand men, and had we not wanted arms could have made above ten thousand';⁶⁹ on arrival at Frome on 28 June, 'we wanted nothing but arms',⁷⁰ but were disappointed that what might have been provided by the inhabitants had 'by a curious stratagem' been 'taken from them a few days before our entrance'.⁷¹ Then, in relation to the

62. Longleat, Thynne MS XXII, fol 179v.

63. Oldmixon 1730, 703. The offer was made by 'one Silver ... Brother to Captain Silver Master-Gunner of England', a reference to Captain Thomas Silver, master gunner of Whitehall and St James's Park, 1682–1703: Tomlinson 1979, 238–9; Childs 2014, 202–3. On organ guns, see Carman 1955, 79.

64. BL, Harley 7463, fol 10r. It also lists 'Engine of 160 Musq't Barrells' at £50. The inventory of 1691 (BL, Harley 7458, fol 12r) lists 'engine of 160 Musquett Barrells' valued at £50 and 'engine of 6 Musquett Barrells' at £1 10s. The inventory of 1693 (TNA: PRO, WO 55/1734, fol 19) notes 'Engine of 12 Musqt Barells taken from the late Duke of Monmouth' valued at £3. This may be the origin of the 17th-century musket barrels mounted in the 19th or 20th century to form the three replica six-gun organs in the Royal Armouries collection (XII 1799 a, b and c).

65. On its authorship, see Chandler 1995, 99; for the text, see Chandler 1995, 118–24, and Muddiman 1929, 164–70.

66. Chandler 1995, 120; Muddiman 1929, 165.

67. Paschall wrote four accounts. The longest and earliest (BL, Add MS 4162, fols 118–35) is reproduced as the 'Account of the Rebellion of the Duke of Monmouth in a letter to Dr James Heywood from the Reverend Mr Andrew Paschall of Chedsey in Somersetshire', in Heywood 1811, App IV, no. IV, pp. xxix–xliv. A shorter one, 'An account of the D. Monmouth's landing & his success', is held in the archives of Hoare's Bank (RN/8/59), and is reproduced in Paschall (1961) and Chandler (1995, 106–10). The third, entitled 'Lord Feversham's March', is in the Drayton House Archive (Sackville MS, Monmouth Rebellion 1685–1686); see also HMC 1904, vol 1, 27–8. All three include a plan of the battlefield. A fourth account, with notes and another map of the battlefield, is at the Bodleian, MS Ballard 48, fol 74.

68. HMC 1876, App 1, 8.

69. Chandler 1995, 121; Muddiman 1929, 166.

70. Chandler 1995, 122.

71. *Ibid.*, 121–2; Muddiman 1929, 168.

failure to take Bristol, the account notes that 'For had we but had arms, I am persuaded we had by this time/ had at least twenty thousand men. And it would not then have been difficult for us to have march'd for London'.⁷² In his deposition of July 1685, Richard Goodenough, Monmouth's paymaster, similarly lamented that 'If they had had 20,000 arms, they had had as many men, but brought onely 2500 arms',⁷³ ruefully noting what they might otherwise have achieved. While his figures must be treated with caution, Taylor's account of Monmouth's forces on the eve of Sedgemoor tells us that Monmouth had, in addition to better-armed contingents and his 'sithears', '3000 foot more, some with Halberds, Prongs, bills & what they could gett', and, in addition to '400 hors compleatly Armd', about '300 hors more, which some had Arms & others none'.⁷⁴ Elsewhere, he describes the army as 'badly armed'.⁷⁵ The need for improvised weapons was therefore obvious and urgent.

SCYTHES IN WARFARE

Scythes have been used in Britain since at least the first century AD,⁷⁶ and, until the late nineteenth century, were the principal tools for mowing hay, barley, rye and oats, and from the eighteenth century, for wheat.⁷⁷ Scythes are used two-handed, standing up, using a rhythmic swinging motion, the blade slicing through the crop near the ground: they should not be confused with sickles, also used for reaping but held in one hand while the other grasps the stems, and which have narrow crescent-shaped blades. Scythes in their intended form can, at a pinch, be used as deadly weapons, as allegedly in the martyrdom of the unfortunate Saints Sidwell, Urith and Walstan by pagan reapers, and whose symbol is a scythe.⁷⁸ At a more factual level, they are known to have been presented as weapons, if not necessarily wielded, in unplanned stand-offs between various authorities and rural labourers, not least by reapers actually at work: examples include those at Wolsingham (Co. Durham) in an incident related to enclosure in 1538,⁷⁹ and one at Holme Fen (Cambridgeshire) in 1632, related to drainage.⁸⁰ Such occasions cannot have been uncommon.

Unadapted scythes also appear in historic images of combat, such as that after Holbein of the German Peasants' war (1524–5), Jacques Callot's *Les Misères et les Malheurs de la Guerre* series of 1633⁸¹ and even a contemporary depiction of Sedgemoor (fig 3), although the draughtsmen may not have realised that the blades were usually re-hafted;⁸² at least one

72. Chandler 1995, 122; Muddiman 1929, 167.

73. BL, Lansdowne 1152, fol 243v.

74. National Library of Jamaica, MS 105, 88; see the Supplementary Material, pp 13–14.

75. National Library of Jamaica, MS 105, 86; see the Supplementary Material, p 10.

76. Finberg 1999, 75–7, fig 7; Edwards 2002, 113–5; Goodall 2012, 82, 97–101. The British Museum has a fine 9th–10th-century example (Museum no. 1912.0723.5).

77. Letts 1999, 24–5. Numerous medieval depictions of scythes can be seen at <<http://www.hayinart.com/003277.html>> (accessed 20 Sept 2019).

78. Farmer 1978, 356–7 and 386.

79. Gairdner 1893, 209.

80. Bruce 1862, 501; Page *et al* 1936, 185.

81. Callot 1633, Pl 17 'Le Revanche des Paysans'.

82. Less excusable are modern illustrators who seem never to have seen a scythe at all (see, for example, Chandler 1995, 58 fig 9, 69 fig 11).



Fig 3. Scene from the woodcut illustration to a Broadside entitled 'A Description of the late Rebellion in the West. A Heroick Poem', published on 7 September 1685. The only contemporary image of the battle itself, it shows a scytheman, with a re-hafted scythe, among the rebels and an unconverted scythe discarded in the foreground. *Image*: from Anon 1685.

sixteenth-century author, Paulus Hector Mair, even produced instructions for their use in duelling, although whether actually practised is doubtful.⁸³ What may be an unadapted scythe is shown being used to cut a ship's rigging in a fifteenth-century tapestry at Berne.⁸⁴

However, a working scythe, with the blade fixed to the haft or 'snath' at an acute angle, while capable of making martyrs, is a very clumsy weapon. On the other hand, re-fixing the blade axially to (that is, in line with) a straight haft makes a weapon to be reckoned with. In several European languages the result was dignified by its own term, reflecting their widespread use; hence, for example, *Kriegsensense*, *Sturmsense*, *faux de guerre*, *falce di guerra*, *boiova kosa* (Ukrainian), *boevaja kosa* (Russian) and *bojowe kosa* (Polish) – the English equivalent, 'war scythe', appeared only in the twentieth century, reflecting its *relatively* sparing use in the Anglo-Saxon world, and the term is more familiar to war-gaming enthusiasts than historians. Terms are important in identifying the use of re-hafted scythes in historical documents, but there are pitfalls: the French term *fauchard* or *fauchon*, for example, describing a variety of pole-arms with curved blades, is derived from *faux*, but only thanks to their loosely similar appearance, and not to the *fauchard's* real form or origins. Terms clearly confused people even in the Middle Ages, including, it seems, the draughtsman of the English Assize of Arms of 1242 (discussed below).⁸⁵ The depiction of an unconverted

83. *Opus Amplissimum de Arte Athletica*, commissioned by Paul Hector Mair c 1540, probably represents an imagined activity rather than an established form of combat: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Cod. Icon 393. <<http://mdz10.bib-bvb.de/~db/bsb00007894/images/>> (accessed 2 May 2017). This is probably true of the sickle duels represented later in the work (fols 226r–232r) – the author is grateful to Marek Tobolka for advice on this point. On Mair, see also Knight and Hunt 2008, 1–5; for a spirited attempt to enact Mair's instructions see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSXsLAzX9cc> (accessed 23 Sept 2019).

84. Bernisches Historisches Museum, inv no. 8. Reproduced in Waldman 2005, fig 157.

85. Maxwell Lyte 1911, 483.

scythe wielded by Perseus, in an early fifteenth-century illustration of Christine de Pisan's *L'Épître à Othéa* of c 1400, probably owes to the artist's interpretation of her word *fauchon*.⁸⁶ To complicate matters further, a variety of purpose-made pole-arms with curved blades also resemble the re-hafted scythe and have a cutting edge on the inner or 'concave' side of the blade: the most obvious is the glaive, with a straight-backed but curved-edged hafted blade of 2–3ft long, followed by the gisarme, with a rigid blade sharply curved towards the tip and spikes to the rear, and the many variants of the bill and the woodman's slasher. Consequently, terms alone in the Middle Ages and later cannot be relied upon to differentiate re-hafted scythes from superficially similar but quite different weapons. Modern historians, unfamiliar with scythes, weapons or either, sometimes describe a variety of pole-arms shown in medieval and later images as scythes, as they are apt to do with sickles.

Scythe blades could also, incidentally, be used to make a form of sword by straightening the tang and fitting a hilt: an example, supposedly owned Thomas Müntzner, leader of the German peasants in 1525, is displayed in the Dresdner Rezidenzschloss; this is certainly a scythe blade with a straightened tang, although the eagle-headed brass hilt is seventeenth or eighteenth century and the object's real history before the late nineteenth century is unknown.⁸⁷ The 'Saxon's sword' at the Tower, described and illustrated in the 1780s and 1790s, may be another (fig 4).⁸⁸

Many agricultural, forestry and other tools can, of course, be used as or converted into weapons, notably the pitchfork and the threshing flail, both of which appear in descriptions and depictions of rebel actions from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, including in the contemporary woodcut of Sedgemoor (see fig 3); sickle blades could also be mounted on poles, if creating a weapon of dubious value. However, the abundance of scythes, used in both arable and pastoral farming, and the ease with which they could be converted prompted their particularly widespread use as weapons from the sixteenth century well into the twentieth. Although most commonly used by rebels and insurgents, they could also be issued to militia units or others attached to official forces: the municipal arsenals of Solothurn (Switzerland), for example, bought 475 *Segessen* (scythes) in 1499,⁸⁹ and the town council of Berne acquired large numbers in the seventeenth century;⁹⁰ the Royalist irregulars raised by Reverend James Wood against the rebels at Preston (1715), were 'armed partly with swords and pistols and guns and partly with scythes fixed to the end of a long stick',⁹¹ and in 1720 or 1727 the garrison at Gibraltar was equipped with £10-worth of 'upright scythes to defend the covered way or counterscarp'.⁹² In 1848, contingents of the Hungarian militia were, according to their commander, 'mostly armed with scythes'.⁹³ They were also used by Polish volunteer units raised by the regular army in 1939 (discussed below).

86. *L'Épître à Othéa*, BL, Harley 4431, fol 98v; Bibliothèque National, FR 606, fol 4v.

87. Inv no. VI 0376. The author is grateful to Holger Schuckelt for this information (29 Jan 2019), and to Stefano Rinaldi for the opportunity to inspect it on 2 May 2019.

88. Thornton 1784, opp. 70; Barnard 1791, opp. 7; Skinner 1795, opp. 70. Borg 1976, 338 and pl 84.

89. Büeglinger and Leutenegger 2004, 56–7.

90. Von Rodt 1834, vol 3, 216.

91. Marc Hoechner, pers comm 19 Dec 2017; for Preston, see Ryder 1939, 234.

92. Shaw and Slingsby 1957, cxxxiii.

93. Görgey 1852, 73.

Surprisingly, however, while routinely mentioned in secondary sources and fiction relating to the Middle Ages, hard evidence of use before about 1500 has proved elusive.⁹⁴ Tantalisingly, the English Assize of Arms of 1242 contains a reference to the *falces* with which men with land and goods worth less than £2 were required to muster at the king’s request, along with gisarmes (*gysarmas*), knives and ‘other small arms’,⁹⁵ but the meaning is unclear: while *falx* was used in classical and medieval Latin to mean ‘scythe’, it referred also to other tools, and its use here may be intended to include any kind of pole-arm, improvised or otherwise. In fact, the earliest reference to (what were presumably) re-hafted scythes found in preparing this article, in either Britain or Europe, is that of 1499. This remains something of a puzzle, as, while scythes were less abundant before the Early Modern period, and would have been less effective against armoured soldiers than their cloth-clad successors, it is hard to believe that they were not used as weapons, for example (and as is routinely claimed in secondary literature) by the Hussites,⁹⁶ or in the *Jacquerie* of 1358, in 1381, by Cade, or in any of the hundreds of rural and provincial revolts of the period. Instances of earlier use will no doubt come to light.

As it stands, in a British context, the Sheffield ‘scythes which had a most Keene edge’, discovered with other arms in 1639 en route to the Scottish rebels, are the earliest known – although, as applicable to the reference of 1499, the inference is that these were weapons, or to be part of weapons, of an established type;⁹⁷ this is at least in keeping with a contemporary woodcut showing ‘Prentises and Sea-men’ assaulting Lambeth Palace in May 1640, in which the re-hafted scythe held by at least one of them passes without comment in the lengthy caption.⁹⁸ The next mentions relate to occasions in the Irish rebellion of 1641, one early in the year⁹⁹ and another later, during both of which the protestant refugees in two castles in Co. Cavan (Ireland) successfully attacked their Irish besiegers with ‘scythes upon long poles’.¹⁰⁰ Instances followed in the English Civil Wars, including at Bradford in December 1642,¹⁰¹ at Crowland¹⁰² and Birmingham¹⁰³ in 1643 and at Colchester in 1648,¹⁰⁴ and re-hafted scythes were also a favoured weapon of the civilian ‘clubmen’

94. The author is grateful for the advice of Matthew Bennett, Anne Curry, Kelly de Vries, Anthony Fletcher and John Gillingham, pers comms Nov and Dec 2017.

95. Maxwell Lyte 1911, 483.

96. For example, by Tarle 1943, 13. Scythes are not mentioned in Fudge (2002), a compendium of sources related to the Hussite wars.

97. Harris 2014, 395.

98. Underdown 1985, 160–1 pl 2A. An original is at BL, TT E.116 (49), fol 2.

99. Temple 1646, 79; Hamilton 1920, 161.

100. Clogy 1863, 214; Hamilton 1920, 154. The text was written *c* 1675.

101. Donagan 2008, 76, 333. Wright (1842b) cites *The Kingdoms Weekly Intelligencer* in noting that ‘the Bradford men were armed with swords, sithes, long poles with sickles fastened to the end of them, flayles, spits and such like weapons’; Wright (1842a, 67) also refers to ‘our syths and clubs now and then reaching them’ (that is, the Royalist mounted officers). Another contemporary, Captain John Hodgson (Scott 1806, 94), on the defence of the town against the Royalists, mentions ‘a party of clubmen, or such as had scythes layed in poles, [who] fell upon their horse on one side’.

102. Sweeting 1899, 167.

103. Warburton 1849, vol 2, 149 n 1: according to a contemporary account, Prince Rupert’s foot were armed with ‘pike, half pikes, halberds, hedge-bills, Welsh hooks, clubs, pitchforks, with chopping knives, and pieces of scythes’.

104. The beleaguered Royalists armed their cavalry, whose horses they had eaten, with ‘halberds, brown bills, and sythes, straightened and fastened to handles, about six foote long’: HMC 1891, 28.

who assembled to protect themselves and their property from both sides throughout the conflict.¹⁰⁵ Later, scythes were carried by the Covenanters at Rullion Green¹⁰⁶ and in Galloway,¹⁰⁷ at Drumclog¹⁰⁸ and at Bothwell Bridge (both 1679),¹⁰⁹ the local antiquarian Ralph Thoresby noted that the ‘artificers’ of Leeds, fearing an imaginary Irish invasion, spent Sunday 16 December repairing firearms and ‘fixing scythes in shafts (desperate weapons) for such as had none’.¹¹⁰ They were subsequently used by Jacobite troops before, at and after the Boyne (1690),¹¹¹ by both sides at Preston in 1715,¹¹² by loyalist irregulars mustered at Northallerton¹¹³ and in mob violence at Bromwich (Lancs) in the same year,¹¹⁴ at Prestonpans in 1745,¹¹⁵ and in Ireland again in 1760, at Carrickfergus,¹¹⁶ in 1798¹¹⁷ and in 1848.¹¹⁸ No doubt the British Local Defence Volunteers of 1940 mustered a few as well.

105. For example, see Morrill 1976, 154 (citing HMC 1930, vol 2, 91): a letter from Walter Littleton to Colonel Henry Hastings refers to a rabble ‘of all sorts convened together, being neither disciplined nor armed; some with birding guns, others only with clubs, others with pieces of scythes, very few with muskets’. The incident took place at Lichfield in February 1642.
106. 28 Nov 1666, the last episode of the Pentland rising. For use of scythes, see Turner 1829, 167: ‘The foot [were armed with] musket, pike, sith, forke and suord’.
107. Everett Green 1864, 275: the Scottish rebels had ‘few arms except scythes, made straight and put on long staves’.
108. Scott 1806, 47: among the Covenanters were ‘a number of men armed with scythes, forks, pikes and halberts’. An officer of the Army (1726, 18–19) reports that ‘Clavers very providentially escaped by dismounting one of his trumpeters, when his own horse’s guts were cut with a scythe’.
109. Anon 1842, 611.
110. Thoresby 1830, vol 1, 189.
111. Hayes-McCoy 1990, 218. Hogan 1958, 468: M. d’Avaux to Louvois, 20 Sept 1689, from Drogheda ‘*On a fait emmancher une assez grande quantité de faux, et on en a donné dix par compagnie où il n’y avoit que des piques*’. Mulloy 1983–4, vol 1, no. 864, 436–8: M. d’Esgrigny to M. de Louvois, from Dundalk, 2 Jul 1690 re the Irish infantry: ‘*La moitié de l’infanterie n’a point espée, et n’est armée que des bayonnettes, de piques et des faux*’; *ibid*, vol 3, no. 1872, 47: M. Fumeron to M. de Louvois, from near Dundalk, 27 Sept 1689: ‘*nous avons donné des faux emmanchées aux soldats a qui on n’a pu donner d’autres armes*’. Story (1693, 40) wrote of the Irish infantry in 1689, ‘some had scythes and some had pikes’.
112. Oates 2015, 122. Oates (2011, 178) cites an order regarding the mustering of loyalist volunteers before Preston: ‘bring what arms they have fit for service, and scythes putt in straight polls and such as have not, to bring spades and billhooks for pioneering with’. Ryder (1939, 234) states the rebels were armed ‘partly with scythes fixed to the end of straight sticks’.
113. Oates 2011, 150 (citing *Evening Post*, 967, 15–18 Oct 1715), the men held ‘firelocks, swords, halberds, axes, scythes, forks and such weapons as they could get to make a proper defence’.
114. Oldmixon 1735, 602: ‘but the next day they came in greater Numbers, with Scythes, Reaping-hooks, set in proper Handles, about two Yards long, large Clubs, and some Fire-Arms’.
115. As recorded in the memoirs of James Johnstone, known as the Chevalier de Johnstone (Johnstone 1870, vol 1, 22–4): ‘Mr McGregor, Captain of the regiment of the Duke of Perth, in default of other arms, took scythes, well sharpened, which he attached to the ends of sticks from seven to eight feet long, the points in height [sic] like the lance of a spontoon, with which he armed his company, and which, was a most murderous weapon . . . The MacGregor company with their pikes made most dreadful carnage. They cut in two the legs of horses, as well as the horsemen through the middle of the body.’
116. MacNevin (1845, 71) quoting a contemporary source. Although named as ‘Lochaber axes’, they are described as ‘a scythe fixed longitudinally to the end of a long pole’.
117. Gordon (1803, 15), in the context of an attack on Wexford, ‘on whose side the brave Major Vallotton fell, by the stroke of a scythe blade fixed on the end of a pole’; Anon 1795, 43.
118. Hayes-McCoy 1943, 120, citing the *Nation* of 17 June 1848, 395.

On the Continent the deployment of such weapons was an all too normal practice for centuries, on the part of small bands and armies, in great campaigns and local revolts, and engagements from skirmishes to battles. Recorded sixteenth-century instances may be confined to the German Peasants’ War of 1525¹¹⁹ and the revolt of the Pitauds (France, 1548),¹²⁰ but seventeenth-century ones are more numerous, including in the Austrian *Jacquerie* of 1624,¹²¹ by the Ukrainians against the Poles at and after Berestechko in 1651,¹²² by the Cossacks under Stepan Raziin in 1670–1,¹²³ and by the defenders of Mons in 1691.¹²⁴ Eighteenth-century instances (other than those in Poland) include those in Bavaria in 1705 (the Sendling massacre),¹²⁵ in the Pugachev rebellion of 1773–5,¹²⁶ in the Vendée in 1793,¹²⁷ and against the French near Berne in 1798 (Breitenfeld and Grauholz).¹²⁸ The next century saw them used in preparation for the landward defence of Copenhagen in 1801,¹²⁹ near Kassel (Hesse) in a rising against the French of 1809,¹³⁰ by the Prussian *Landsturm* (militia) in 1813,¹³¹ in the Peninsular War,¹³² in the Vendée again in 1832,¹³³ and in both Hungary¹³⁴ and Baden in 1848.¹³⁵ In 1837 a manual for the use of the Swiss militia was published in Chur (Graubünden), illustrating scythemen, in uniform and out, and describing their usefulness and deployment.¹³⁶ In the twentieth century – other than in Poland – they were used in the Spanish Civil War.¹³⁷

119. Pole-mounted scythes were used at Frankenhausen (May 1525): Belfort-Max 1899, 40. An example considered to be 16th-century is held in the Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr in Dresden (inv no. BAAQ 5166), as is a reproduction (BAAF 4993), described as ‘a replica of a war scythe from the peasants war’ (observed on site 2 May 2019).
120. Paradin 1554, 716–7: the men of Saintes, in revolt against the salt-tax were ‘embañonez de harquebuzes, arbalestres, fourches de fer, picques & Faux, enmanchees à l’envers’.
121. Auguste Demmin (1870, 427) noted that ‘In Austria during the *Jacquerie* or peasants war [that is, 1620–5] all smiths detected converting agricultural implements into weapons were punished with death’.
122. Chevalier (1663, 151) relates that after capturing a redoubt and its Polish garrison, the Ukrainians ‘*abbatirent les testes avec leur faux, armes dont leur infanterie se sert ordinairement au lieu de piques*’. See Basilievsky 2017, 287.
123. Anon 1958, 657. The author is grateful to Sofia Piller for translating this passage.
124. The artilleryman Pierre Surirey de Saint-Rémy wrote in his *Mémoires d’Artillerie* (1745, vol 2, 98) that, during Louis XIV’s siege of Mons in 1691, ‘*faux à revers*’ were used by the defenders ‘with some success, but later they were thrown back with great losses, and a great quantity of these scythes were taken from them’.
125. Probst 1978, two-page pl between pp. 216–17, described at p. 462.
126. Anon 1958, 657; Moon 1999, 248. The author is grateful to Sofia Piller for translating this passage.
127. Deniau 1906, vol 1, 636, 701, 703; vol 2, 33; Gabory 1912, 306; Crosefinte 2018, 21–31.
128. *The debates and proceedings in the Congress of the United States*, vol 8, col 1,935, June 1798: numerous secondary sources including Yates 1842, 263.
129. Feldbaek 2016, 72.
130. Dorpalen 1969, 498–9, citing original sources.
131. Charras 1866, 175.
132. Hall 1975, 14: ‘those who had none [weapons] went through the motions [presenting arms] equally well with their pikes and staves formed out of scythes and reaping hooks, by which these redoubtable warriors were, according to their own account, so speedily to eject the French from their country’. This was the eye-witness account of Captain Basil Hall (1788–1844).
133. *Niles Register*, 1 Dec 1832, 215, citing a contemporary Vendéen pamphlet.
134. Görgey 1852, 37.
135. Bak and Benecke (1982, 227) discuss a pamphlet issued to the oppressed ‘Brothers and fellow citizens of the state of Baden’ urged them to muster with ‘guns, swords and straightened scythes’.
136. Anon 1837: illus 1 following p.146, text pp. 147–9.
137. Fernandez 2007, 108.

But it was the Poles who made the most widespread use of re-hafted scythes, most famously at the battle of Raclawice in 1794 and others of the same year,¹³⁸ and again in 1830,¹³⁹ 1831,¹⁴⁰ 1848,¹⁴¹ and 1862–3 (the ‘January uprising’).¹⁴² Twentieth-century use may have begun in 1908 in Austrian Poland, where both uniformed and peasant-clad nationalist volunteers were drilled in using the re-hafted scythe, and at least one illustrated manual was published, in 1913, to instruct them.¹⁴³ The weapons were used again in anger in the 1920s, but probably the final use of scythes in warfare on any scale, and perhaps the most heroic and forlorn of all, was in Eastern Pomerania in 1939: on 9 September, in a manner reminiscent of Monmouth’s action in 1685, the Polish commander in Gdynia ordered the re-quisation and conversion of 500 scythes, augmenting an existing force of scythemen that soon numbered as many as 2,000. By 20 September, having seen much action and some tactical successes, they, along with regular forces in the province, inevitably succumbed to overwhelming German strength.¹⁴⁴ A result of all this was that scythemen (*kosywnierzy*) became symbols of Polish nationhood, abundantly represented in art and literature in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁴⁵ The most famous manifestation is the spectacular *Panorama of Raclawice*, painted for the centenary of the battle and now at Wrocław, which gives a convincing, moving and terrifying impression of scythemen in action (fig 5); the re-hafted weapon, or at least the blade, appears on numerous nationalist emblems from the late nineteenth century onwards,¹⁴⁶ and the crossed blades, along with a

138. Storozynski 2009, 184–6.

139. Sperber 2017, 318.

140. Extract from the memoirs of Vincenti David (d. 1887) cited in Klukowski 1984; at Szczecbrzeszyn, for example, in November 1831, in the uprising against the Russians, ‘In the smithies, the smiths worked even on holidays. Agricultural tools were modified into pikes. Scythes were mounted on poles’ (ibid).

141. Sperber 1994, 136: ‘by the end of April [1848] Prussian troops were sent against Mieroslawski’s insurgents. Armed largely with scythes beaten straight, they were no match for the regular army.’ This conflict, in the Poznan region, was part of a Polish attempt to shed Prussian rule. *The Illustrated London News*, 20 May 1848, 32, with an engraving entitled ‘Conflict between Polish-scythe-men and the Prussian troops’. The author is grateful to Anna Taborska for bringing this to his attention.

142. For an eye-witness account, see Anderson (1864, 15); for scythemen at the battle of Malogoszcz (24 Feb 1863), see Davies 2005, 263.

143. *Regulamin Cwiczeń Kosą [Scythe Drill Regulations]* (Anon 1913), written by or for the *Drużyny Bartoszone* [Bartoszone Troops], an organisation named after Wojciech Bartosz Glowacki, a hero of Raclawice, see <<https://polona.pl/item/regulamin-cwiczen-kosa,Mzc1MTI2Mw/7/#info:metadata>> (accessed 23 Sept 2019).

144. See Zawilski 1972, 54–75, and Bałaban 1979, 62–133. At 132, Bałaban reproduces a photograph of two Gdynia scythemen with their weapons. The author is grateful to Anna Taborska for reading and translating extracts from this material.

145. In visual art, most famously in the *Panorama* painted 1893–4 by Jan Styka (1858–1925) and Wojciech Kossak (1856–1942) now at Wrocław, see Piątek and Dolistowska 1988 (English text at 30–2, scythemen in action and on the march are shown in pls 1a, b, c, 2, 3a, b, c, d, e, 4a, b, c, 11c, d, e; Kosciuszko’s famous assault on the Russian guns is best shown at pls 4 and 4a); see also Nowak 2016, 6071, and Teodorczyk and Ratajczyk 1987, 114–17, and figs 40, 41, 47, 76. There are examples on display in the Polish Army Museum, Warsaw. See also the 1913 film *Kościuszko pod Raclawicami* <[https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ko%C5%9Bciuszko_pod_Rac%C5%82awicami_\(film_1913\)](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ko%C5%9Bciuszko_pod_Rac%C5%82awicami_(film_1913))> (accessed 24 Sept 2019) and the film of the same name of 1938 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VHqrMFCCig>> (accessed 24 Sept 2019).

146. Piątek and Dolistowska 1988, pl 4a; Zaborniak *et al* 2017, 396–7.



Fig 5. Detail from the *Panorama raclawicka* (the *Raclawice Panorama*), painted in 1894 by Jan Styka and Wojciech Kossak, now at Wrocław. It shows the moment, in the battle of April 1794, when Tadeusz Kościuszko's *kosynierzy* overran the Russian battery. Scythes had been used in Poland within the lifetime of the artists, as they would be later, so we can be confident that this is a realistic depiction of scythes in action. The Russian flintlock small arms and artillery of 1794 had changed little since Sedgemoor. *Image: A fragment of the Raclawice Panorama, Wikimedia Commons CC-BY-SA 3.0.*

scytheman's cap, featured on the insignia of the 7th Kościusko air squadron, formed in 1919,¹⁴⁷ and that of the RAF-equipped *Dywizjon Myśliwski 'Warszawski im. Tadeusza Kościuszki'* ('The Tadeusz Kościuszko Warsaw Fighter Squadron') of 1939.¹⁴⁸

Re-hafted scythes were also, not surprisingly, used in areas where the original implement was employed outside Europe, including in North America and India: in the former, examples include the Mormon defence of Fort Limhi (present day Idaho) in 1858,¹⁴⁹ and in the latter, use by civil rebels in the Mutiny.¹⁵⁰

Surviving 'war scythes' in the British Isles may be confined to the Royal Armouries' examples and twelve of the thirteen blades displayed, quite remarkably, in St Mary's church Horncastle (Lincolnshire) (fig 6), nine with tangs straightened for fitting into the

147. Cynk 1998, 34. There are examples of the badges on display in the Polish Army Museum, Warsaw.

148. *Ibid.*, 221; Anna Taborska, pers comm 1 Feb 2018.

149. Hartley 2001, 154.

150. Chaudhuri 1957, 208.



Fig 6. The thirteen blades displayed in St Mary's church, Horncastle (Lincolnshire), all but one of which were hand-made and adapted for service as weapons. At least fifty were present in 1861. When and why they were adapted and placed here remains to be discovered. *Photograph*: John Aron.

haft-end, two with tangs bent round to form sockets, and one flattened and pierced with three holes for rivets (fig 7). All twelve are thin-bladed, ground on the underside and have raised ridges at the rear, as with (bar the grinding) VII.960 and VII.961, although whether steel-edged or wholly of wrought iron is unclear. The blades are the survivors of up to fifty displayed there, 'many' still hafted, until 1861, and have a traditional and part-recorded history of great interest.¹⁵¹ A scythe blade with a straightened tang at Snowhill Manor (Gloucestershire), in the former collection of Charles Paget Wade (d. 1956), may be another, although the wear pattern suggests it may have been adapted for use in an improvised chaff-cutter, or at least re-used as such.¹⁵² As for those abroad, the Metropolitan Museum of Art formerly had two,¹⁵³ and the Philadelphia Museum of Art at least one,¹⁵⁴ but most,

151. Visited 13 Nov 2017. The author is very grateful to Mary Silverton, Michael Heatt and Bob Wayne, and especially David Birchall, for making the visit possible and for much help and information. For the history of the blades, see Jalland 1901, 1–3, and Walter 1908, 41; both are mentioned by Laking (1920–2, 205–6). The blades are now displayed above the west face of the arch between the south aisles of the nave and chancel. One has recently been re-hafted by David Birchall.

152. Inv no. NT 1334317. Examined only via photographs, kindly supplied by Jennifer Rowley Bowen (29 Mar 2018 and 21 Jan 2019).

153. Inv nos 14.25.204 and 14.25.200; both sold in 1956. The catalogue cards give a Hanover provenance and suggest a 17th-century date, which the accompanying photographs would certainly admit. The author is grateful to Donald La Rocca for this information.

154. In the 1980s. The author is grateful to Donald La Rocca for this information. The item does not appear in the 1963 catalogue (Von Kienbusch 1963).

(a)



(b)



Fig 7. Details of two Horncastle blades showing the two forms of adaptation: in (a) the tang has been straightened to fit a drilled hole in the end of the haft, as in VII.960; in (b) the tang has been bent to form a socket through which the haft was passed and then riveted to the blade. *Photographs*: John Aron.

amounting to many hundreds, survive, needless to say, in Europe and include: in France, two held by the Musée de l'Armée,¹⁵⁵ and a possible example in the Musée de l'art et d'Histoire at Cholet (Maine-et-Loire);¹⁵⁶ in Germany, examples are to be found in the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin¹⁵⁷ and the Militärhistorisches Museum der

155. Cat nos K170 ROB and K144 PEN. They are described as late 18th-century. The author is grateful to Olivier Renaudeau for this information.

156. Cat no. D972.001. The blade might, however, have been adapted from a hay knife. The author is grateful to Françoise Pineau for providing photographs.

157. Information provided by museum staff.

Bundeswehr in Dresden;¹⁵⁸ in Switzerland, they are to be found in the Bernisches Historisches Museum¹⁵⁹ and at least one municipal building in Berne,¹⁶⁰ the Museum Altes Seughaus in Solothurn,¹⁶¹ the Landesmuseum in Zürich,¹⁶² and the Schloss Kyburg near Zürich;¹⁶³ in Poland at the Wawel in Krakov,¹⁶⁴ the National Museum Krakov (Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie),¹⁶⁵ and the Polish Army Museum (Muzeum Wojska Polskiego) in Warsaw.¹⁶⁶ Other owners include the National Museum (Nacionalinis Muziejus) in Vilnius,¹⁶⁷ the Zaporozhye Museum of History in Zaporozhia (Ukraine)¹⁶⁸ and the Salzburg Museum.¹⁶⁹ Further specimens no doubt survive in public ownership, and clearly do in private hands, as shown by their occasional appearance at auction.¹⁷⁰

The effectiveness of ‘war scythes’ is most obviously indicated by their widespread and enduring use, but is also illustrated by specific instances and recorded details. Among these is the gruesome death of a tax official in the Pitaud revolt, decapitated by a ‘*Faux emmanchée à l’envers*’,¹⁷¹ and during the Irish rebellion of 1641 mentioned above, when the Irish ‘made such foul work and havoc amongst their enemies that such persons as were not cut to pieces, or mangled with these terrible weapons, were either taken prisoners or forced to run away’.¹⁷² Taylor, although not at Sedgemoor,¹⁷³ but who can be assumed to have visited the battlefield on 6 or 7 July and spoken to survivors,¹⁷⁴ tells us that:

for indeed these Sithes was a desperat Wepon, loping off at one Stroak, either head, or Arm, and I saw a man layinge among the dead, whose back was clove down, by

158. Inv no. BAAQ 5166. Observed on site 2 May 2019. Illus in Hoyer 1975, pl opp. 176.

159. See Von Wegeli (1939, 195–9) on *kriegssensen*, where he lists 28 items, all 18th-century; a photograph of one, no. 1911 (pl XXVII), is clearly a scythe blade (61cm long) affixed by tang and ring.

160. Marc Hoechner, pers comm 19 Dec 2017.

161. Büeglinger and Leutenegger 2004, 57–60. All but two are described as 18th-century.

162. The museum has nearly 250 examples on site, dated from 1600–1700, and a large number dated specifically to 1690–1700: Dr Erika Hebeisen, pers comm. The collection can be examined at <https://www.nationalmuseum.ch/sammlung_online/?sID=59> (accessed 24 Sept 2019). Others from the same collection can be seen at Schloss Kyburg.

163. Ulrich Kinder, pers comm 21 Aug 2017. There are at least twenty-six on display. They are on loan from the Swiss National Museum in Zürich and are said to date from the 17th century. These are sophisticated weapons, with purpose-made square sectioned hafts, to which the blades are fixed by fitting the flattened tang into a slot and fixing with two rings. In most case the blades have been ground to a point.

164. Czyżewski 2013, 278–9 (Polish entry), 422–3 (English entry). The two weapons date from about 1846 and were restituted from the Hermitage in 1924.

165. Visited and viewed 17 May 2018 in the company of Michal Dziewulski. The weapon is displayed with Kosciusko’s tunic and has been fitted with a hook at the rear.

166. Visited and viewed 15 May 2018 in the company of Aleksandra Bukowska. Six examples are on display, two with hafts that may be original. All are given an 1862–3 provenance.

167. Tadas Šėma, pers comm 5 Oct 2018. The museum holds three examples used in the 1862–3 uprising, cat nos IM 5275, IM 11750, D.e. 2394. All are hafted. One blade is from a chaff-cutter.

168. Shlaifer and Dobryansky 2014, 40 and fig 4. Four of the blades illustrated are taken from chaff-cutters, the fifth is a purpose-made pole-arm blade.

169. Markus Schwellensattl, pers comm 17 Jan 2019: the museum has six examples, with hafts, described as 17th-century.

170. See, for example, the list of recent sales provided by Czyżewski (2013, 421).

171. Paradin 1554, 717.

172. Clogy 1863, 214–5.

173. Chandler 1976, 47; Supplementary Material, pp 2, 18.

174. Supplementary Material, p 2.

one struck of these Sithes, and a horse whose head at one strock, was almost separated from his body.¹⁷⁵

In a marginal note he adds that 'now that their orders was to cutt of the bridle arm, thereby the disable the riders, and defend themselves, the which they to the last stoutely did'.¹⁷⁶ An eye-witness at Prestonpans observed similar effects: 'The MacGregor company with their pikes [re-hafted scythe blades] made most dreadful carnage' and 'cut in two the legs of horses, as well as the horsemen through the middle of the body'.¹⁷⁷ In the Vendée revolt of 1793, Louis Brard, a participant in an engagement at Vrines (Poitou-Charentes), reported that the survivors of a scythe assault 'were missing limbs, had horrible gashes, with shreds of flesh falling from their bodies'.¹⁷⁸

At Raclawice, Kościusko's own account of the battle explains that the Russian battery had time to fire only two rounds before 'together [our] pikes, scythes and bayonets broke the infantry, overcame the cannons and took apart the column in such a way that the enemy cast aside his weapon and ammunition pouch as he fled' (see fig 5).¹⁷⁹ Aigner (see below), while himself not a front line combatant, asks in his *Manual*, 'who will not admit that scythes are a terrifying weapon in the hand of our Peasants fighting for property, liberty?' He further explains that:

The scythe terrifies the horse with its brightness, and thereby slows the momentum of the cavalry; it puts to the cavalryman a weapon more terrifying than a sword and inflicts mortal blows upon him. This I have from mouths worthy of belief, as in the camp of the commander-in-chief of the armed force are found peasants who so nimbly and swiftly put scythes to the cossacks that their heads flew off in the blink of an eye.¹⁸⁰

A report of Lublin in 1863 similarly observes that, cornered by the Russian cavalry,

Some of the insurgents tried to defend themselves; and, with sharp scythes which were their chief weapons, inflicted frightful gashes upon the men and horses . . . Many of the mangled horses were to be seen, having lost their riders, galloping about with their entrails hanging out.¹⁸¹

This account is a reminder of the effectiveness of scythemen, in particular, against cavalry, horses' bellies and sinews being very vulnerable to their long sharp blades; hints that this was well understood are to be found in a number of sources, including in the incidents at Bradford in 1642 (mentioned above), where Sir John Gothericke 'had his horse killed with

175. National Library of Jamaica, MS 105, 95–6; Supplementary Material, pp 19–20.

176. Supplementary Material, p 20.

177. Johnstone 1870, vol 1, 22–4 and vol 3, 24; on Johnstone see *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, <http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/johnstone_james_4E.html> (accessed 24 Sept 2019).

178. Cited by Deniau (1906, vol 2, 33 n 2) 'manquaient de quelques membres, avaient d'horribles entailles et des lambeaux de chair qui retombaient sur leurs corps'.

179. Kopczewski 1968, 48; see also Storozyński 2009, 185–6, 191.

180. Aigner 1794, 12: the author is grateful to Anna Taborska for this translation.

181. Anderson 1864, 127. The 'double-bladed' scythes were probably of the type held at the Schloss Kyburg.

a syth',¹⁸² 'our sythes and clubs now and then reaching them, and none else did they aime at'¹⁸³ and when the Parliamentary musketeers fired on their counterparts, the scythemen 'fell upon their horse', the aim being their 'scattering'.¹⁸⁴

Their actual effect could be enhanced by their psychological impact, not least on professional soldiers confronting a weapon of unknown capability and against which no drill had been devised, possibly heightened by the image of the scythe-bearing 'Grim Reaper', of biblical origin, depicted in increasingly familiar form since the fourteenth century.¹⁸⁵ As noted at Colchester in 1648, the 'sythes, straightened and fastened to handles, about six foote long' were 'weapons which the enemy strongly apprehended, but rather of terror than use'.¹⁸⁶ In a similar vein, Monmouth's 'sithes' were indignantly described by the Royalist drummer Adam Wheeler as 'cruell and new invented murdering weapons',¹⁸⁷ and by Taylor as 'Strang and Unheard of'.¹⁸⁸ John Oldmixon, a twelve-year-old witness to the battle, was convinced of both their practical and psychological effect: had Monmouth's battle plan succeeded, he later wrote, 'the soldiers ... asleep in their Tents ... might have been cut to pieces by the Scythemen, of which the Duke had 500, [and] the Terror of the Weapon unleashed on the sleeping royal army [would have] added to the Slaughter and Horror of the Night' and 'given the rest of the Duke's forces an easy Victory'.¹⁸⁹ In a similar vein, in 1793 it was noted that Vendéens, attacking a battery, '*avec leurs faux et leurs fourches ... écharpaient les artilleurs frappé de stupeur*',¹⁹⁰ while another contemporary, noting the peasants' use of '*faulx emanchées à l'envers*', added that they were 'weapons of terrible appearance'.¹⁹¹ The point is well reinforced by the German troops' disproportionate fear of the Gdynia scythemen, whom they called '*die schwarze Teufels*' ('the black devils'), and later made the victims of vicious retribution.¹⁹²

To this it might be added that the potential military usefulness of scythes, both pre- and post-conversion, could be recognised and feared by officialdom. In Austria, during the Peasants War of 1620–5, smiths detected converting agricultural implements into weapons – if not exclusively scythes – were punished with death;¹⁹³ and a similar order

182. Lister 1842, 69.

183. Ibid, 67.

184. Ibid; Cooke 2004, pp.34–5.

185. See Revelation 14:14–16: in the Vulgate, the word used is *falx*, meaning either scythe or sickle, but translated from King James onward as sickle. The earliest pictorial association of scythe-bearing and representations of death may be in the *Triumph of Death* fresco of the 1330s in the Camposanto, Pisa, by Buonamico Buffalmacco (worked 1313–36). Paul Binski, pers comm 24 Jan 2019; White 1993, 552–4 and fig 339.

186. HMC 1891, 28.

187. Malden 1910, 160: Earl of Pembroke, 'some of the regiment and some of the Militia Horse to goe with him to Froome, Where he Forced the Rebels to lay downe their Armes, and brought away with him the Constable of that Towne to Trowbridge who proclaymed the Duke of Monmouth as King, and severall cruell and New invented murdering Weapons as *Sithes* and ye like'; see also Chandler 1995, 132.

188. National Library of Jamaica, MS 105, 95.

189. Oldmixon 1730, 703.

190. Deniau 1906, vol 1, 701.

191. De Donnissan de la Rochejaquelein 1823, 88: '*les faulx emanchées à l'envers, armes dont l'aspect est effrayant*'.

192. Balaban 1979, 231, 247.

193. Demmin 1870, 427.

was issued by the English Commissioners for Ireland in 1651.¹⁹⁴ In Poland in 1863, under Russian occupation, a printed certificate signed by the Chief of Police was required 'to acquire for farming purposes [number] of scythes', clearly to restrict their use as weapons.¹⁹⁵

To test and add to historical evidence of the effectiveness of the 'war scythe', in 2018 the author had the tang of a haft-less blade straightened by the Otley blacksmith Joseph Pack, and fitted it to an 8ft hazel haft, reinforced at the sharp end by two iron collars, and then honed it to a carving-knife sharpness.¹⁹⁶ The blade is a twentieth-century example of the 'Austrian' type, a little shorter, thicker and heavier than Monmouth's scythes and which therefore handles differently but makes a weapon close enough in type for some useful experiment. The effect on a suspended (roadkill) roebuck carcass, showed, in short, that eye-witness accounts of dismemberment and evisceration are all too plausible.¹⁹⁷

The fact was, however, that re-hafted scythes as a battlefield weapon bore no comparison in overall effectiveness to purpose-made equipment, particularly to firearms and pikes in trained hands or to disciplined and determined cavalry. Fighting a live and retaliating opponent would have been more testing, not least in that a freshly cut haft, especially in summer – a far cry from the professionally made pikestaff of seasoned ash with langets¹⁹⁸ – could have been severed by a powerful sword stroke, which may explain the apparently short-handled weapons shown on the contemporary playing cards (see fig 10). In addition, rapid shrinkage of green hafts would have required repeated adjustments to the fit of blade, or soaking in water – even, in the case of Monmouth's rebels, between 31 June and 6 July. Scythemen, therefore, tipped the scales of victory in few major battles involving regular or official forces – Raclawice being the most obvious example – although their role in skirmishes and actions could be tactically important, as, for example, at Prestonpans, Lublin, and even in Gdynia in 1939. This was recognised by Kościusko himself who wrote that 'The strength of Pikers and Scythers cannot withstand regular armies', although his remedy was that 'they are themselves incorporated into regular armies', suggesting that the issue was more with training than the weapon.¹⁹⁹ To this effect, he commissioned the Warsaw architect Chrystian Piotre Aigner (1756–1841) to write his remarkable *Krótką naukę o pikach i kosach* (*A Short Treatise on Pikes and Scythes*) of 1794, setting out how both could be used to best effect (fig 8).²⁰⁰

194. Gilbert 1880, vol 3, iii, 277–8; Hayes-McCoy 1943, 108.

195. An example is displayed in the Polish Army Museum, Warsaw. The author is grateful to Anna Taborska for the translation.

196. Joseph Pack, of Valley View Forge, Otley, West Yorkshire. The work was done on 12 Jan 2018 and payment refused, for both of which the author is very grateful. Mr Pack also made the collars.

197. The author is most grateful to Matthew Rice for kindly supplying the carcass, and arranging for, participating in and filming the experiment, which took place on 21 Jul 2018, at Bampton, Oxfordshire.

198. Made of ash, in the case of a 16–18ft pike, either from a coppiced stool cut at 7–10 years, or from a stooled or standard stem thick enough for several staves to be split from it. For example, see Ellis 1742, 37.

199. Aigner 1794, 5.

200. Storozynski 2009, 197

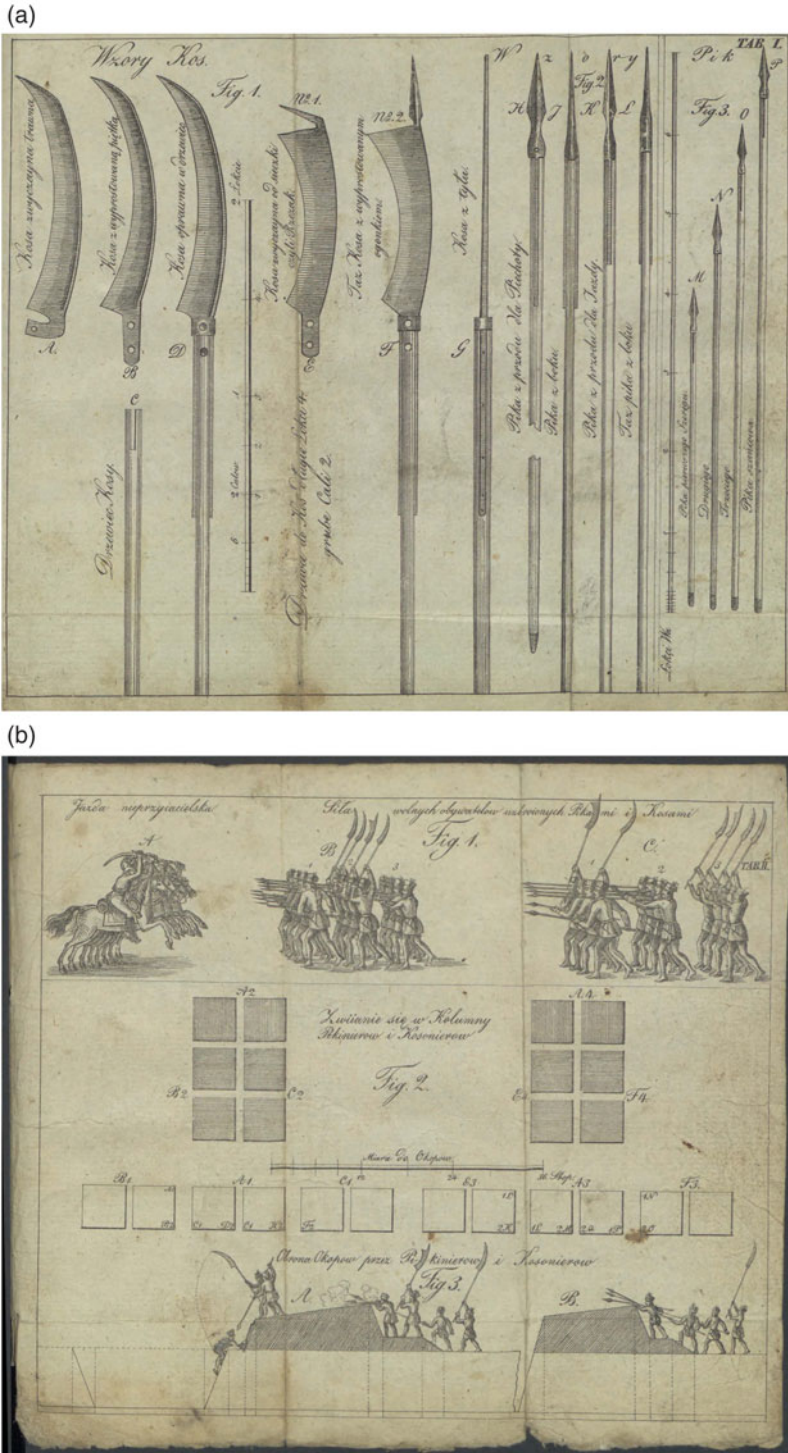


Fig 8. Two diagrams from *Krótką naukę o pikach i kosach* [A Short Treatise on Pikes and Scythes] showing: (a) how blades, both ‘mowing scythes’ and chaff-cutting blades, could be adapted and rehafted; and (b) how a ‘force of free citizens’ armed with pikes and scythes might be deployed in the field. Images: From Aigner 1794, Tablica I and Tablica II.

PROCUREMENT AND CONVERSION

Monmouth's men garnered these weapons by a variety of means. Some must have been brought in by the rebels, newly made for the occasion or as relics of the Civil War; some of the 160 members of a 'Club army' who joined Monmouth's army encamped near Bridgwater on 2 July may have inherited such things;²⁰¹ Thomas Allen reported that when John Kidd and the cloth worker Weely marched out of Frome on 4 July, 'their armes were Hatchets, Clubs, Hayforks and Sythes riveted into poles about 8 foot long'.²⁰² As these sources, Taylor²⁰³ and others show, scythes were not the only tools pressed into or adapted for service by Monmouth's forces, but Monmouth's order to requisition them, within a week of landing, shows that they were the weapon of choice: presumably the duke was impressed by those his men already had, but may also have recalled their use against him at Bothwell Bridge in 1679.²⁰⁴ Accordingly, on Friday 19 June, as noted in a postscript to an anonymous account of the rebellion, there:

were issued out warrants and subscribed Mon; requiring all Constables in their respective hundreds & tythings, to bring into the camp at Taun[ton] by Saturday mor: 10 of the clock all sythes; of those warrants I sawe one, and read it at Kingstone.²⁰⁵

The text of one of the warrants was transcribed by Paschall, headed 'a copy of the warrant for scythes' and is addressed in this case 'To the Tithing-men of Ch.'. It states that:

These are, in his Majesty's name, to will and require you, on sight hereof, to search for, seize, and take all such scythes as can be found in your tything, paying a reasonable price for the same, and bring them to my house tomorrow by one of the clock in the afternoon, that they may be delivered in to the commission officers, that are appointed to receive them at Taunton by four of the same day, and you shall be reimbursed by me /what the scythes are worth. And hereof fail not, as you will answer to the contrary. Given under my hand this 20th day of June, in the first year of his Majesty's reign.²⁰⁶

The text was published by the lawyer, historian and would-be biographer of Monmouth, Samuel Heywood (1753–1828) in 1811.²⁰⁷ The 'Tything-men' were parishioners responsible for public order, usually subordinate to elected constables; Monmouth's claim to authority was, only hours old, as 'king', hence the threat to the tything-men of having to 'answer', and, according to George Roberts, writing in the 1840s, of 'having their houses burnt'.²⁰⁸ The ten-mile distance between Chedzoy and Taunton suggests that the warrants were issued to a number of places within at least that radius, and they were perhaps printed;

201. Chandler 1995, 40–1; BL, Harley 6845, fol 280v.

202. Longleat, Thynne MS XXII, fol 177r.

203. National Library of Jamaica, MS 105, 88.

204. Anon 1842, 611.

205. BL, Harley 6845, fol 288v. A warrant summoning workmen to Bridgwater was also seen by the author (*ibid.*). 'Kingston' is presumably Kingston St Mary, about four miles north of Taunton.

206. This comes at the end of Paschall's longest account (BL, Add MS 4162, fols 118–35, at fols 134–5). This is reproduced in Heywood 1811, App IV, xlv; see also Clifton 1984, 167.

207. Ditchfield 2004, 981.

208. Roberts 1844, vol 1, 329.

the example seen by Heywood may have been preserved by Paschall. How many blades were 'delivered in' is unknown, but the strength of scythemen by the end of the campaign, at about 500, suggests some success; a 'reasonable price', meanwhile, would have been between one and two shillings apiece.²⁰⁹ The 'house' in Taunton was presumably 'Mr Hookers', described by Wade as the 'Duke's quarters in this town'.²¹⁰

What is obvious, however, is that there would have been little time after issuing the order on Saturday 30 July and 4 o'clock the next day to cut and prepare enough hafts, preferably ash or, at a pinch, of hazel, willow or birch. Taylor noted, as observed after the battle, that the hafts he saw were 'Strong Stafs about ten feet long, of good supple Ash, about 1½ Inch Diameter'.²¹¹ There was still less time, between 4 o'clock and the army's departure for Bridgwater on the same day, to adapt the blades, even though a smith working in a forge would have needed no more than five to ten minutes' work per item,²¹² and a few minutes to prepare at least one iron ring or ferrule to keep the haft from splitting.²¹³ Using the simplest process, as in the case of VII.960, the next stages were to shape the shaft to take the rings and then drill and shape a socket to fit the tang, tasks that took the author (in making the replica 'war scythe' discussed above) four to five minutes and about thirty-five minutes respectively.²¹⁴ Fitting the blade and driving it home was the work of a few seconds, so, using this method, the whole process (apart from procuring the haft) of creating the weapon would have taken roughly an hour; the other methods described below, which may also have been used, could have taken a little less. The result was illustrated (fig 9) and described by Taylor: 'these Sithes were about fower foot Long, and fower inches brod, and one Inch thick at the back', and he added that 'in the Lowerward they were bound with a ferul [ferrule] and had a sharp spike, about 9 inches long, in all respects as you see in the figure',²¹⁵ a refinement that was perhaps a rarity. Taylor also relates that the 'sithers' had 'pistols sticking in at their Girdles, and brod sords, in wast belts', but this is unlikely to have applied to many, any more than the plumed and lace-bedecked costume portrayed in his drawing.

Creating these weapons in a hurry, of course, depended on the availability of smiths and forges, although at a pinch it could have been done without specialist equipment by any practical man. Monmouth's ranks, as any army's had to, certainly included smiths and farriers, such as James Edwards of Shepton Mallet²¹⁶ and Daniel Manning, apprentice to Walter Upham, who was conscripted at Shoreditch (near Taunton).²¹⁷ There must also have been smiths in Taunton, perhaps including Messrs Caninges, Ayles and

209. In 1541 the going rate was 1-2/- each (Cope 1989, 1); in 1703 a stock of 440 score (8,800) scythes at Cradley (Worcs) was valued at £450, that is, about 1s 6d each (Rowlands 1975, 31). In 'the 17th century' a new scythe cost between 1s 4d and 2s 6d (Hey 1990, 361; Shenoy 2010, 499). The Tower inventory of 1692-3, however, values foraging scythes at 5s 6d each (BL, Harley 7463, fol 16v).

210. MacDonald Wigfield 1980, 166; BL, Harley 6845, fol 278r.

211. National Library of Jamaica, MS 105, 95.

212. David Birchall, pers comm 13 Nov 2017. Joseph Pack, using a hammer, anvil and a coke-fired forge, took seven minutes to adapt the author's example.

213. Using 'bar' or scrap iron. Joseph Pack, pers comm Feb 18.

214. The hole was drilled with a spiral-tipped spoon auger, and then shaped to fit the tapering square section of the tang with a chisel. This was the most time-consuming part of the process.

215. National Library of Jamaica, MS 105, 95

216. Little 1965, 130; SHC, Somerset Quarter Session Rolls, 163, fol 16. The author is grateful to Phillip Hocking for providing a photocopy of this document.

217. Macdonald Wigfield 1980, 41-2, 145.



Fig 9. Drawing *c* 1688–9 by John Taylor from his 'Historie of his life and travels in America and other parts of the universe'. Taylor had joined the royal army as a Royalist cadet and, although not present at the battle of Sedgemoor, had visited the site immediately afterwards. He misunderstood how the blades were re-hafted, and the dandified costume cannot have been typical, but this remains the only detailed near-contemporary depiction of a Monmouth scytheman. *Image*: Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica (MS 105).

Case, mentioned respectively in 1656, 1663 and 1672,²¹⁸ and the blacksmith Dyer, who came to Monmouth at or on the way to Bridgwater with a copy of the king's pardon and was promptly arrested.²¹⁹ There were, of course, others in nearby villages

218. SHC, Somerset Quarter Session Rolls 91/12; 1103/16; 116/85; inventories DD/SP 1680/99; DD/SP 1684/99; DD/SP 1684/36. The author is grateful to Phillip Hocking for providing this information.

219. Chenevix-Trench 1969, 193.

(three named in 1680 and 1684)²²⁰ whose services may have been offered or commandeered, as in the case of labourers summoned to Bridgwater on 2 July.²²¹

The conversion method found in VII.960 is common to the majority of surviving continental examples, including most of the thirty-seven at Solothurn,²²² but a still simpler method, at least as illustrated in nineteenth-century images of historic actions and illustrated in detail in the Polish *Regulamin Ćwiczeń Kosq* of 1913, was to use two rings to fix the tang to the *side* of the pole's end;²²³ this also seems to have been used by the Vendéens in 1793.²²⁴ Other simple processes were employed, depending on choice and the form of the tang as found. In the case of a broad, flat tang, it could be inserted into a sawn slit at the end of the haft and secured by rivets, as illustrated by Aigner in 1794, langets also being fitted (see fig 8a).²²⁵ A third method, used in the case of two of the Horncastle blades, several in the Polish Army Museum, one at Berne, and by the Vendéens,²²⁶ was to re-form the tang into a ring, through which six inches or so of the pole could pass and then be riveted to the blade (see fig 7b).²²⁷ The fixing method found in the other RA example, VII.961, would only have been required if, as in this case, the tang was missing, although here the arrangement probably post-dates its arrival at the Tower, as does the haft.

More sophisticated weapons could be made, time and skill permitting, by adapting the blades themselves; as in the early seventeenth-century examples at the Schloss Kyburg, in which they have been re-ground to present a convex edge and a point, and riveted to a square-sectioned or octagonal haft with the aid of long metal strips.²²⁸ A variant of this, found in an eighteenth-century Polish example, was to straighten the blade itself and point the end.²²⁹ An eighteenth-century exhibit in the National Museum Krakov, has a straightforward socketed tang, but with the addition not only of langets (fitted under the collar), but also a backward-facing hook, secured by two rivets, for dismounting horsemen.²³⁰ On the Continent, similar weapons, most commonly in Poland, were made using blades taken from chaff-cutters, broader at the far end and terminating in the spike on which the blade pivoted when in use.²³¹

220. Somerset Quarter Session Rolls 91/12; 1103/16; 116/85; inventories DD/SP 1680/99; DD/SP 1684/99; DD/SP 1684/36. The author is grateful to Phillip Hocking for providing this information.

221. Humphreys 1892, 13; HMC, 1904, vol 1, 12; BL, Harley 6845, fol 28ov.

222. Bueglinger and Leutenegger 2004, 57–60.

223. Anon 1913, 13.

224. Crosefinte 2018, 31 and pl 5.

225. Aigner 1794, pl 1 A, B, C, D.

226. Crosefinte 2018, 31 and pl 5.

227. Berne Inv no. 14174 (Marc Hoechner, pers comm 12 Jan 2018).

228. Ulrich Kinder, pers comm Aug 2017. Dr Kinder kindly supplied numerous photographs on which this description is based.

229. Czyżewski 2013, 422.

230. Viewed by the author on 18 May 2018.

231. Aigner describes and sets out how to effect the conversion (1794, pl 1 E, F, G, H and 12–14, labelled 15–17: the author is grateful to Anna Taborska for translating these pages). Chaff-cutters are depicted, for example, in *The Chaff-Cutter* by David Teniers the Younger (1610–90), Dulwich Picture Gallery accession no. 42, <<http://www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk/explore-the-collection/101-150/the-chaff-cutter/>> (accessed 24 Sept 2019); Caspar Netscher (1639–84), *Chaff Cutter with his Wife and Child*, c 1662–4, Philadelphia Museum of Art, cat no. 544, <<http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/102335.html?mulR=1901608126|2>> (accessed 24 Sept 2019); Pyne 1806, unpaginated. Several examples are held by the Museum of English Rural

These seem not to have been used in the British Isles, probably as these devices were rarely used here before *c* 1800.²³²

DEPLOYMENT AND EFFECTIVENESS IN 1685

Scythemen first appear in the contemporary accounts of the rebellion in relation to 'Capt. Slape's company of sithes and musquetes being 100' added to the duke's forces on 21 June, nine days after landing.²³³ Their first action appears to have been in the encounter at Norton St Philip (27 June), where Wade, anticipating renewed attack by Feversham, 'drew up 2 pieces of canon into the mouth of the lane and guarded them with a company of sithmen'.²³⁴ The enemy withdrew, but to be noted is that the scythemen's anticipated role was wholly defensive, that is, to protect the guns and gunners. Scythemen saw action again the next day at Frome, where, the *London Gazette* reported, recruits (said to have been 2,000–3,000 strong) armed 'some with Pistols, some with Pikes and some with Pitch-Forks and Sythes'²³⁵ engaged a militia force under the Earl of Pembroke. Wheeler tells us that the earl 'forced the Rebels to lay downe their arms', including 'Sithes and the like'.²³⁶

The next engagement involving scythemen seems to have been Sedgemoor itself. Their numbers, deployment and command are not wholly clear, but a key source relating to both issues is James II's own account. This explains that on the final approach to Sedgemoor were 'the Foott, which consisted of five great Battalions, each of wich had one company of at least 100 Sythmen instead of Granadeers';²³⁷ the 'Battalions', as Wade reported, were the Blue, White, Red, Green and Yellow regiments of infantry, in addition to which there was an eighty-strong 'Independent Company which came from Lime'.²³⁸ King James's report therefore implies a total of about 500 scythemen (a figure also cited by John Oldmixon)²³⁹ and that they were under the command of various regimental colonels. Taylor, meanwhile, although not a reliable source for rebel numbers, wrote that 'Munmouth had in his Army 300 sithers'.²⁴⁰ Confusingly, however, Paschall's (longer) account refers to '1000 scythe-men',²⁴¹ but he was not present at the battle, unlike

Life, Reading, including MERL 70/220, <<http://www.reading.ac.uk/adlib/Details/collect/13183>> (accessed 24 Sept 2019). The author is grateful to Dr Oliver Douglas for information on the museum's holdings. The spike served as a pivot, the blade being raised and brought down by hand or treadle to slice off short lengths of hay or straw pushed towards it along a trough.

232. Brigden 1983, 29; Oliver Douglas, pers comm June 2017.

233. Wade, reproduced by Macdonald Wigfield 1980, 166; BL, Harley 6845, fol 278r.

234. Chandler 1995, 35; BL, Harley 6845, fols 274r–282r at fol 279v; Macdonald Wigfield 1980, 161–71.

235. *London Gazette*, 25–29 June 1685, no. 2046, 1, <<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/2046/page/1>> (accessed 24 Sept 2019); Tincey 2005, 31–2.

236. Malden 1910, 160.

237. King James II's account, reproduced in Chandler 1995, 113; BL, Harley 6845, fol 291r. As written, the '1' of 100 looks superficially like a '2', but the difference in how the King wrote the two digits is clear from elsewhere in the MS, for example at fol 295r, where the figure '1200' appears, the '1' being much like that at fol 291r, and the '2' completely different.

238. Wade, reproduced by MacDonalld Wigfield 1980, 152; BL, Harley 6845, fol 264r.

239. Oldmixon 1730, 703: 'scythemen, of which the Duke had 500'.

240. National Library of Jamaica, MS 105, 88 and see also 95; Supplementary Material, pp 13, 19.

241. BL, Add MS 4162, fol 129.

Wade, the king's primary source. The king's explanation that scythemen were used 'instead of Granadiers', while surprising in that they had neither the equipment nor training of these elite troops,²⁴² concurs with Taylor's comment that 'these sithemen were the Tallest and lustyest men they could prick out'.²⁴³ Both statements tend to underline the importance that Monmouth attached to these men and their weapons, and King James's is also interesting in hinting that – as was the case with grenadiers – the 'sithemen' were dispersed among the ranks of musketeers and pikemen, as does the reference to Slape's 'company of sithes and musquetes'. Scythemen are also shown mixed among pikemen on one of a remarkable set of contemporary playing cards (fig 10),²⁴⁴ although not actually at the battle, and in a woodcut illustrating a Broadside of 7 September 1685 (see fig 3).²⁴⁵

Other sources, however, suggest that scythemen instead formed a discrete unit (or units). One of these is the confession of John Kidd, which referred to one William Thompson, 'an officer and linnen draper of London' who 'commanded the Scythemen';²⁴⁶ another, varying the theme, is Taylor, who tells us that on the morning of Sedgemoor

Munmouth ranged both his horse, and foot forces, and put them in order; Himself; and Count Horn, commanded the Infantry; Count Horn commanded the Sithmen particular, and the Left Wing; Munmouth commanded his maine Batatalia of Foot, and the Lord Greay, commanded the Body of the Calvary.²⁴⁷

By 'Count Horn', Taylor is referring, as Childs has shown, to the mercenary Anthony van Buys, who had landed with the duke, and eventually turned king's evidence and was pardoned.²⁴⁸ Prior to the battle, the scythemen had been formed into a discrete detachment under Captain James Hayes of the Red or Duke's regiment, which we can assume (if these sources are correct) was in the end led by van Buys.²⁴⁹ This is consistent with Taylor's claim that after Grey had fled 'Count Horn and his Siths stoutly maintained their ground against Oglethorps hors . . . until Mounmouth's Main Batallia drew up'.²⁵⁰ King James's account is similar in mentioning that Oglethorpe's cavalry 'tryd one of their Battallions, but was beaten back by them, tho they were mingled amongst them, and had severall of his men wounded and knocked off their horses'.²⁵¹

Taylor's comments at this point and elsewhere on the role of scythemen in the battle are also useful in refuting Paschall's claim that scythemen were wholly absent, to the effect that Wade's 1,000 'scythe-men' were among those who 'came not to the fight'.²⁵² Clearly they were not, and, as Taylor reveals in describing their effect, they left a lasting impression on observers. It is also significant that re-hafted scythes are shown, respectively, discarded

242. Childs 1976, 59, 62; Chandler 1995, 184.

243. National Library of Jamaica, MS 105, 95; Supplementary Material, p 19.

244. For the other playing cards, see <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?partid=1&assetid=473071001&objectid=3117845> (accessed 24 Sept 2019).

245. BL, C.20, fols 3–5; reproduced in Muddiman 1929, 251.

246. Macdonald Wigfield 1980, 28.

247. National Library of Jamaica, MS 105, 87–8; Supplementary Material, p 13.

248. See Supplementary Material, n 11.

249. *Ibid.*

250. National Library of Jamaica, MS 105, 90.

251. King James's account, reproduced by Chandler 1995, 116; BL, Harley 6845, fol 294r.

252. BL, Add MS 4162, fol 129.



Fig 10. Four playing cards from a commemorative pack of 1685, illustrating incidents in Monmouth's rebellion. (a) The two of Diamonds shows a re-hafted scythe on the ground at Frome, (b) the Knave of Clubs shows re-hafted scythes interspersed with pikemen, and (c) the King of Spades and (d) the Queen of Clubs show other scythes abandoned at Sedgemoor. Images: Reproduced by kind permission of the British Museum, © The Trustees of the British Museum.

and in use on the battlefield on the playing cards and the Broadside of September 1685 (see figs 7 and 8).

MONMOUTH'S SCYTHES AT THE TOWER OF LONDON

Sedgemoor ended, as Paschall put it, with a 'total rout of the Duke's army'.²⁵³ In addition to 200–400 rebels killed in battle, many more were cut down in fleeing: the parson and churchwardens of Westonzoyland counted 1,384 burials within the parish, and the bodies of others, who died in the cornfields, were only found at harvest.²⁵⁴ Their arms were abandoned in flight or left where they fell: the Earl of Pembroke, although not an eye-witness, wrote of 'the rout of Sedgemoor, where most of them were killed, dropping their armes and flying into ditches'.²⁵⁵ Taylor tells us that the rebels 'in the most confused maner betoock themselves to flight, each shifting for himself as well as he could soe that nothing but Scaterd Arms, and dead carcasses lay every where, scattered on the Ground'.²⁵⁶ The arms must have included re-hafted scythes, and indeed both the King of Spades and the Queen of Clubs in the 'new pack of cards representing (in curious lively Figures) the Two late Rebellions throughout the whole course hereof in both Kingdoms', printed in November 1685, show them lying on the ground,²⁵⁷ as does the only other contemporary image of the battle, the Broadside of September 1685 (see fig 8).²⁵⁸ The scene must have resembled that in the colourful and ghastly painting of the massacre of a peasant army in 1705 at Sendling, near Munich, which shows dozens of re-hafted scythes and other tools scattered among the casualties.²⁵⁹

Normal seventeenth-century practice for the victors, followed by swarms of camp followers, was to seize anything useful or valuable from the dead, wounded and captured, although the speed of the Sedgemoor campaign meant followers were few.²⁶⁰ At Sedgemoor, the eagerness of government troops to begin is evident from Adam Wheeler's account, in which he 'was one of those/of the Right Wing of his honour the Colonel Windham's Regimt who after the Enemy began to run desired leave of his honour to get such pillage on the feild as they could finde', although Feversham's answer was at that moment no, 'on Paine of Death'.²⁶¹ This 'pillage' involved the robbing of any prisoners who, as Wheeler put it, 'had a good Coate or any thinge worth the pilling' and 'were very fairely stript of it'.²⁶² The retrieval of weapons, however, was a matter of official interest, thanks to their value both to the victors and potentially to enemy survivors. On their destination, Taylor is

253. Chandler 1995, 110.

254. Chandler 1995, 73; see also Supplementary Material, n 83. The figure of 1384 comes from Adam Wheeler's *Iter Bellicosum* (Chandler 1995, 136). An anonymous account by a member of Colonel Wyndham's militia notes that 'There were buried July 6th ... 1161 [rebels] in one tything' (Salisbury Cathedral Archives DC/SM/2; Waylen 1859, 316–19).

255. Earl of Pembroke to James II, July 1685 (HMC 1904, vol 1, 20).

256. National Library of Jamaica, MS 105, 91–2; Supplementary Material, p. 18.

257. Cited and commented on in Humphreys 1892, 19. The advert was printed in the *London Gazette*, 9 Nov 1685, no. 2085, 1, <<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/2085/page/1>> (accessed 24 Sept 2019).

258. Muddiman 1929, opp. 164.

259. Probst 1978, plate between 216–7.

260. John Childs, pers comm Mar 2018.

261. Chandler 1995, 134.

262. *Ibid*, 135.

helpfully specific: following his description of their effectiveness, he adds that ‘These Sithes with abundance more of Mounmouth’s other Arms were brought Up to London, and laid up in the Armory of the Tower of London’.²⁶³ The ‘other arms’ may have included at least some of the armour taken at Lyme and sold from the Tower in 1717, and presumably also Monmouth’s cannon, a supposition supported in the mention by an eighteenth-century Tower visitor Georges-Louis Le Rouge, of ‘*quelques armes & pieces de canon prises sur le Duc de Mont-Mouth*’ in the Spanish Armoury.²⁶⁴ Other items were also captured before the battle: the scythes ‘brought away’ by the Earl of Pembroke after his encounter with the rebels on 25 June at Frome;²⁶⁵ the powder and armour captured at Lyme on 30 June;²⁶⁶ and perhaps the ‘Engine’ recorded in 1692–3.²⁶⁷

Re-hafted scythes first appear in the Tower records in the ‘Survey and Remaine’ finished on the 17 September 1686, described as ‘Scith blades: with staves, 54; without staves, 27’, all in the ‘Serviceable’ column and listed under ‘Spanish Weapons’ (fig 11);²⁶⁸ in 1687 there were ‘95’ ‘sithes’ and ‘27’ ‘sithe blades’ (although ‘95’ may have been a clerical error for ‘54’), all ‘serviceable’ and valued respectively at £25 17s and £6 1s 6d.²⁶⁹ Should there be any suspicion that these were not weapons but tools for foraging, those appear in quite separate lists, and had been kept there in large numbers since at least the reign of Henry VIII:²⁷⁰ the inventory of January 1692/3 lists under ‘Sundry Stores and Incident Necessary’, ‘Sneaths for Sithes, 118’, valued at £1 9s 6d;²⁷¹ the 1713 ‘Remaine’ lists under ‘Tooles of sorts’, including sickles and axes, ‘Scyth Blades, 34; ditto handles, 394; Rings for Scyths, 382, Iron Wedges for Ditto, 870; Wooden wedges, 800’.²⁷² The scythes mentioned were therefore quite clearly weapons, while their listing in 1686 and thereafter under ‘Spanish Weapons’ implies that they were displayed in the ‘Spanish Armoury’, which, along with the Line of Kings and (after 1688) the Small Armoury, was one of the three main attractions at the Tower created after the Restoration.²⁷³ Its main contents were, it was claimed, taken from the Armada of 1588, and by 1676 had been assembled in the ‘Spanish Weopen House’, a building near St Peter’s chapel, before being re-displayed in 1688 on the middle floor room in a storehouse in ‘Coldharbour’, the inmost ward, to the south of the White Tower.²⁷⁴ The scythes’ Monmouth associations were certainly being given out from 1693, probably by Yeoman Warder guides, when they were viewed by the Lutheran Pastor Heinrich Benthem. In his *Engeländischer Kirch-und Schulen-Staat* of 1694 he noted that ‘here some scythes (*sensen*) can be seen with which a whole regiment of Monmouth’s army

263. National Library of Jamaica, MS 105, 96; see also Supplementary Material, p. 20.

264. Le Rouge 1766, 51.

265. Chandler 1995, 132.

266. BL, Add MS 31,956, 3; date in the MS is 20 June. Reprod in Chandler 1995, 125.

267. BL, Harley 7463, fol 10r. It also lists ‘Engine of 160 Musq’t Barrells’ at £50. The inventory of 1687 (BL, Harley 7458, fol 12r) lists ‘engine of 160 Musquett Barrells’, valued at £50 and ‘engine of 6 Musquett Barrells’ at 1 10s.

268. TNA: PRO, WO 55/1730, fol 29r.

269. BL, Harley 7458, fols 15r and 15v.

270. The Tower housed 120 scythes and 24 sickles in 1547 (Starkey 1998, 103, entry 3764: ‘Xen dosein’).

271. TNA: PRO, WO 55/1734, fol 44.

272. TNA: PRO, WO 55/1737, fol 51v. As these are listed among sickles, axes etc., they were clearly intended for foraging.

273. Borg 1979, 69–70.

274. Borg 1979, 336.

Iron Shackles upon a Chain	3	-	-
Tressells	1	-	2
English Partizans Rich	1	-	-
Dutch Halfe Pikes	57	-	-
Grow of Iron	-	-	1
Salberts	1	-	-
Sith Blades.	With Staves	54	-
	Without Staves	27	-

Fig 11. Extract from the 'Survey and Remaine' of 17 September 1686, showing the entry under 'Spanish Weapons', that is, those displayed in the so-called 'Spanish Armoury', naming the 'Sith Blades', fifty-four of them with staves and twenty-seven without (TNA: PRO, WO 55/1730, fol 14r).

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was equipped/ and at the beginning caused considerable damage/ as their blood was then still up'.²⁷⁵ The main purpose of the display, largely of material allegedly intended to defeat, torture and oppress the vanquished English,²⁷⁶ was to trumpet England's invincibility and the perfidy of her enemies. Unlike the Line of Kings or the Small Armoury, however, the Spanish Armoury was effectively also a 'cabinet of curiosities', a type of attraction long familiar to Londoners and their visitors, such as John Tradescant's 'Ark' at Lambeth (extant 1628–83), Robert Hubert's 'natural rarities' near St Paul's (1660s),²⁷⁷ the East India Company's, the Royal Society's (1666 onwards) and the London College of Physicians' (1654–66).²⁷⁸ The scythes were therefore not alone in lacking even an alleged 'Spanish' provenance, being accompanied in 1687 by (for example) four 'Danish clubs',

275. Benthem 1694, 30: 'So sind auch einige Sensen hier zu sehen/womit ein ganzes Regiment von des Monmouths Armee ist bewaffnet gewesen/und anfangs grossen Schaden damit verursacht/ wie sie dann noch voller Blut waren'.

276. Borg 1976, 332.

277. MacGregor 1985, 204–5, 208–9.

278. Hunter 1985, 217, 219.

ten 'Hercules clubs', 'Heading axes, 1', 'King Henry ye 8's walking staffe' and a shield 'of wood with pistols', value £1.²⁷⁹

During the short remainder of James' reign, in line with the government's intentions to discredit Monmouth's cause,²⁸⁰ exposing the scythes to the public conveyed a fairly straightforward warning against rebellion, although their makeshift nature would hardly have trumpeted the prowess of the victors. Under William III, however, who had successfully pursued a version of Monmouth's plan,²⁸¹ their display risked being seriously off-message, as apparently noted by the Tower authorities, as the 'Spanish Weapons' in the inventory of 5 November 1688, during the sensitive period before William became king, included 'Sithes o' and 'Sithe blades 1', at 4s 6d,²⁸² that is, they had been taken off display. In the following year, with the new regime now firmly established, they were reinstated, and the Yeoman Warders, short as ever on political correctness, no doubt made the most of them.

For the rest of the seventeenth century, although only 'some' scythes were on display in the Spanish Armoury, up to eighty-one others were listed among the 'Spanish Weapons', as shown by the inventories of 1689, 1690, 1691 and 1692–3,²⁸³ presumably stored somewhere else. But by 1713, the year the next surviving inventory was compiled, their numbers had reduced to thirty-nine with staves and fifteen without,²⁸⁴ and by the time of the next comprehensive inventory in 1859 there were only two.²⁸⁵ Presumably, the remainder had been sold off or disposed of, or perhaps destroyed in the Grand Storehouse fire of 1841.

There is no reason to doubt, however, that some scythes remained on display in the first half of the eighteenth century. While they are not mentioned in the first guidebook – Thomas Boreman's *Curiosities in the Tower* of 1741 (although trophies of 'the last rebellion in the year 1715' garner a few lines)²⁸⁶ – they do appear in the anonymous *Historical Account of the Tower of London and its Curiosities*, printed in 1754 and 1759, described as 'Some Weapons made with part of a Scythe fixed to a Pole which were taken from the Duke of Monmouth's Party at the Battle of Sedgemoor in the reign of James II'.²⁸⁷ Very similar or identical terms were used in editions of 1768, 1774, 1784, 1789 and 1791, and a plate used in the *Surveys ...* (of London and environs) by Thornton (1784), Barnard (1791) and Skinner (1795) shows, among other items from the Spanish Armoury,²⁸⁸ a pole-hafted scythe blade, missing its heel (probably VII.961), along with the 'Saxon's sword' (see fig 4). Intermittent reference to the scythes was made in guidebook editions of the next decades – being omitted in 1800 and 1801, included in 1803, and omitted again in 1810.²⁸⁹ By 1817, however, they were back in favour, the guidebook pointing visitors to 'A PIECE OF A SCYTHER placed on a pole, being a specimen of weapons taken at the battle of Sedgemoor'.²⁹⁰

279. BL, Harley 7458, fol 14v. The 'walking staff', a combination staff weapon and firearm, and a series of gun-shields are in the Royal Armouries' collection (XIV.1 and, for example, v.81).

280. Keay 2016, 370.

281. *Ibid.*, 382.

282. BL, Harley 459, fol 14v.

283. 1689 (BL, Harley 7461); 1690/1 (BL, Harley 7462, fol 14v); 1692–3 (BL, Harley 7463, fol 13v).

284. TNA: PRO, WO 55/1737, fol 52r.

285. Hewitt 1859, 51, class 7 'various', items 903 and 904.

286. Boreman 1741, 23, 37. The book was probably written by Boreman as well as published by him.

287. Anon 1759, 41.

288. Thornton 1784, opp. 70; Barnard 1791, opp. 7; Skinner 1795, opp. 70; Borg 1976, 338 and pl 84.

289. Anon 1810; the Spanish Armoury is described at 9–18.

290. Anon 1717, 17.

In 1827 the Spanish Armoury display was rearranged, and in 1831, taking up an earlier suggestion by Samuel Meyrick, pioneer historian of arms and armour, it was re-named ‘Queen Elizabeth’s Armoury’.²⁹¹ In 1837 it was re-housed in the barrel-vaulted eleventh-century room beneath St John’s chapel in the White Tower,²⁹² fitted up for the purpose with faux Norman arcading, wall shafts and vaulting ribs. Here, the 1839 guidebook tells us that ‘upon the last pillars are weapons used by the rebels at . . . Sedgemoor’,²⁹³ and John Hewitt, in *The Tower: its history, armories and antiquities* of 1841, notes in Queen Elizabeth’s Armoury ‘Two scythe blades mounted on staves, and used by the rebels at the battle of Sedgemoor in 1685’,²⁹⁴ as does J Wheeler’s *A Short History of the Tower of London* of the same year.²⁹⁵ T B Macaulay, writing in the 1840s, noted that among Monmouth’s weapons improvised from the ‘tools they had used in husbandry or mining . . . the most formidable was made by fastening the blade of a scythe erect on a strong pole’, and that ‘One of these weapons may still be seen in the Tower’.²⁹⁶ An engraving of 1840 of the ‘Norman Armoury’ (that is, the room re-fitted in 1837) appears to show one of them, bunched together with other staff weapons, close to its south-west corner.²⁹⁷ They appear again under ‘Queen Elizabeth’s Armoury’ in a MS catalogue of 1857 (‘Weapon scythe used by the rebels at Sedgemoor 1685’),²⁹⁸ and in 1860 the ‘scythe-blade weapons of Monmouth’s rustics’ were deemed sufficiently interesting to be named among other highlights in a piece in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* promoting John Hewitt’s *Catalogue* of 1859,²⁹⁹ in which they are described.³⁰⁰

In 1869, however, further changes – these by the dramatist, antiquary and polymath, James Robinson Planché – were made to most of the displays in the White Tower and the Horse Armoury³⁰¹ with the blessing of the War Office.³⁰² In the process, Planché re-ordered the contents of the ‘upper room . . . which has for so many years borne the application of Queen Elizabeth’s Armoury’, removing ‘all specimens of a later date than 1603 to other parts of the building’, presumably including the scythes.³⁰³ Between 1878 and 1881, prompted by the recent restoration of St John’s chapel above, the mock-Norman décor was removed,³⁰⁴ and by August 1885 the remaining contents of the

291. Ffoulkes (1916, vol 1, 31) states that ‘the contents of the old Spanish Armoury were moved into the White Tower in 1831’. Anon 1831: ‘Queen Elizabeth’s Armoury’ is described at 10–18; Keay and Harris 2008, 205.

292. Borg 1979, 337; on the building work, Keay and Harris 2008, 206, 213 fig 172.

293. Wheeler 1839, 17.

294. Hewitt 1841, 111.

295. Wheeler 1842, 30.

296. Macaulay 1858, n 384.

297. Published as part of the series ‘Views of the Interiors of Famous Buildings in London, with their costumes and ceremonies’, engraved by Henry Melville (1792–1870) from an original by Benjamin Sly (fl. 1841–55) for George Virtue, 26 Ivy Lane; reproduced in Impey 2008, 213.

298. RA: COLL INV 1/21, 132. The author is grateful to an anonymous referee for this reference and to Malcolm Mercer for providing the text.

299. *Gentleman’s Mag* 1860, vol 208, 510. The author is grateful to Bridget Clifford for bringing this to his attention.

300. Hewitt 1859, 51.

301. Keay and Harris 2008, 205.

302. *Ibid*, 212.

303. Barter Bailey (1997, 140) mentions re-ordering of the collection by J R Planché. The QEA is not mentioned as such in this guidebook.

304. Keay and Harris 2008, 213.

Armoury had been transferred to the western room on the second floor, by then described as the 'Council Chamber'.³⁰⁵

The successive movements of Monmouth's scythes around the building after the 1880s need not be set out here, nor their mentions in guidebooks cited,³⁰⁶ but they were last displayed from 1996 to 2013 in a part re-creation of the Spanish Armoury in the chapel undercroft. Currently in store, they will no doubt have a place in the emerging plans for the transformation of the Royal Armouries' Museum in Leeds, and their history and significance, and that of the re-hafted scythe in general, explained and illustrated to the extent that they deserve.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

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ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbreviations

Bodleian	Bodleian Library, Oxford
BL	British Library, London
<i>Brit Mag Month Regi Relig Ecclesias Info</i>	<i>The British Magazine and Monthly Register of Religious and Ecclesiastical Information</i>
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
<i>Ĵ Galway Arch Hist Soc</i>	<i>Ĵournal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society</i>

305. Ffoulkes 1916, vol 1, 32; Keay and Harris 2008, 213, 216.

306. Lee 1910, 30, pl 2; on the history of re-display in the White Tower in this period, see Keay and Harris 2008, 215–24.

RA
SHC
TNA

Royal Armouries
Somerset Heritage Centre
The National Archives, Kew

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- BL, C.20, fols 3–5: woodcut Broadside depicting the battle of Sedgemoor
- BL, Harley 459, fol 14v: Tower Inventory 1688
- BL, Harley 4431, fol 98v: ‘Illustration of c 1400 to L’Épître à Othéa by Christine de Pisan’
- BL, Harley 6845, fols 252–5: ‘An exact relation of the manner of the late Duke of Monmouths Proceedings on the day of his invadeing and rebellious possessing himselfe of his majesties Towne and Port of Lyme Regis in the County of Dorset. As the same was Testified to the Kings most excellent Majestie in Councill and the Honourable House of Comons whereupon the Act of Attainder passed against the said late Dke’
- fol 264r: ‘Mr Nath Wades Confession made before us undernamed the 29th day of July 1685’ (a summary of the confession by Nicholas Cooke and Henry Clavering)
- fols 266–73v: ‘Mr Wade’s information October 4 1685’
- fols 274–83: ‘Mr Wades further information October 11 1685’
- fols 287r–88v: Anonymous and untitled account of the rebellion
- fols 289r–96v: ‘The Kings Account of the Battle of Sedgemore’
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- BL, Harley 7462: Tower inventory, 1690–1
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