

The 1853 Pattern Cavalry Trooper's Sword

by John Morgan

Background

The Pattern 1853 Cavalry Trooper's sword was significant in the development of British Cavalry weapons in being the first "universal" sword for issue to both Light and Heavy Line Cavalry Regiments and to the Royal Horse Artillery. Although the sword is known as the Pattern 1853 and the first issues were probably made late in that year, it may not have had formal approval till the 14th June 1856 (Figs. 1 & 2).

Its compromise cut and thrust blade was little changed from the previous Light and Heavy 1821 patterns, (Fig. 3), and it is uncertain what actually prompted its introduction. The main difference is in the hilt, the tang being made to the full width of the handle with built-up, shaped, chequered leather grips riveted to each side. This innovation was by a Birmingham sword manufacturer, Charles Reeves, whose name is found stamped on many Pattern 1853 sword blades; he patented the design in April 1853 under Patent no. 960.

The earlier Pattern 1796 swords had been produced in vast quantities and the Light Cavalry swords at least were regarded as successful although the simple knucklebow guards gave little hand protection. The subsequent Pattern 1821 3-bar hilted swords were assembled in the same manner as the 1796 swords and this form of construction was thus in official use for at least 67 years. One can only assume there must have been an unacceptable rate of failure on active service due perhaps to loosening of the hilt or bending or fracture at the junction of blade to narrow tang when subjected to heavy blows; the Pattern 1853 hilt design addressed such a problem. I am surprised the opportunity was not taken at this time to provide better protection for the hand by fitting a solid bowl guard instead of the open 3-bar guard. It does seem a retrograde step to have discarded the Heavy Cavalry guard.

First issues of the new sword were late in 1853 or, at any rate, by early 1854 as PRO.W.44/701 recorded complaints made in March 1854 by the 11th Hussars.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SWORD

An Official précis report produced in 1891, summarising the development of the cavalry trooper's swords from 1853, described the Pattern 1853 sword thus:- "The blade is of best cast steel with a tang of iron welded to the upper end for the purpose of attaching it to the guard. The scabbard is of steel, except in the case of some of early manufacture which were of iron, it has loose rings. The guard is of iron of open bar form. The scabbard is lined with slips of wood".

The construction of the grip is the main distinguishing feature of the sword being almost cylindrical in cross section and comprising built up shaped leather scales, with chequered finish, riveted to the tang which is made to the full width of the grip. The new blade is about the same length and curvature as the Pattern 1821 Light Cavalry



Fig 2. The label attached to sword SP 236 which is signed V. A. Watts, for Director of Inspection of Armaments. You will note that while the sword had been on issue for some while, the Pattern does not appear to have been officially sealed until 14th June 1856. (Ministry of Defence Pattern Room, Nottingham).

blade, but with a shallower fuller which made it stronger and stiffer though heavier. The shallow fullers narrow to a point near the hilt and the blade thus lacks the form of square shoulder of the previous patterns (compare Figs. 3 and 4).

Two bands, with loose rings attached, are



Fig 1. Sealed Pattern 1853 sword; SP 236. The back of the 35 and 1/2 ins. blade is stamped "ENFIELD" and the outer face of the scabbard is stamped with "crown" over "E" over "6" and "ENFIELD". This was the first universal troopers sword for all Line Cavalry. (Ministry of Defence Pattern Room, Nottingham).

braced to the scabbard at about 3 ins. and 12 ins. from the mouthpiece. This is secured by two screws and easily detachable for repair or for the replacement of the wood liners which are securely held by the mouthpiece "springs".

PATTERN 1853 SWORDS AT THE ROYAL ARMOURIES

There are about 64 swords of the Pattern 1853 type held by the Royal Armouries in store, on loan and on display. The names and marks of all manufacturers usually associated with this pattern are in evidence; Enfield, Mole, Reeves and Kirschbaum. A further two examples have a less common

stamping on the blade of "T & C" and one of these, IX2980, is also stamped "6D" over "504" on the hilt and "crown" over "22" on the blade. Although most are of the standard type there are several variants, the most interesting of these I consider to be one with double sword knot slots at the front base of the guard instead of the usual single slot at



Fig 3. Examples of the Pattern Light and Heavy Cavalry swords which were phased out from use with the Regular Cavalry use following the introduction of the new universal 1853 Pattern. Contemporary photographs show the Pattern 1821 Light Cavalry sword being worn by members of the Yeomanry Cavalry well into the 1890's. Those Heavy Cavalry swords not converted to naval use as cutlasses were probably sold out of service or scrapped. Swords were certainly at times broken up in large numbers for example the Ordnance Factory accounts for 1889-1890 records 32,680 as having met this fate!

the pommel. (Fig. 6). The idea was obviously not taken up officially thus probably making this example unique; however a similar slot arrangement was later used in the Pattern 1864 guard though placed at the back of the guard instead (Fig. 16).

Another interesting innovation is a scabbard fitted with a large bellmouth shaped mouthpiece, presumably intended to make the return of sword to scabbard easier for a mounted soldier (Fig. 7, right hand sword).

For some reason the scabbard bands have been removed and the shoe ground down, possibly to allow the fitting of a leather covering with frog attachment, so whether this was carried out by a Regimental armourer or a put forward as a prototype idea for official acceptance is uncertain. In addition to the scabbard alteration, the inner loop on the sword hilt has been cut away and a solid piece of metal neatly welded in and finished to the same shape; this probably being intended to prevent moisture entering the scabbard (Fig. 8).

The Royal Armouries Collection also includes several Pattern 1853 swords with guards on which the divisions between the bars are continued as engraved lines to the pommel, as on the Pattern 1821 Light Cavalry hilt (eg.IX.1734). Compared with the standard pattern the quillons on these swords are wider and the disc terminals are of smaller diameter seven of them having straight, flat, quillons and it was noted that three of the blades have been officially shortened for practice use. There are also 2 further examples of this type except the quillons are downturned in the normal manner (see Fig.9).

Two further variant scabbards are worth a mention. One, IX.7876, has had the two bands removed (if they were ever present) and a frog stud fitted; the mouthpiece is missing. The following inscription is near the mouth... "Triplicate pattern scabbard as altered for Cape Mounted Rifles, at Enfield, September 1862, altered 1037". It is worth noting that these modifications exactly correspond with List of Changes, para 562, dated 6th May 1862.

The other scabbard, IX.7846, has been shortened by about 6 to 8 ins. and provides a reasonably good fit for sword IX.6386 which is one of the straight quillon variants with shortened practice blade; the sword has markings to the 6DG.

Finally I refer to a document held at the Royal Armouries, the "Official Register of all articles deposited at the Tower of London..." which bears a later stencilled date of "circa 1870" on the title page but which

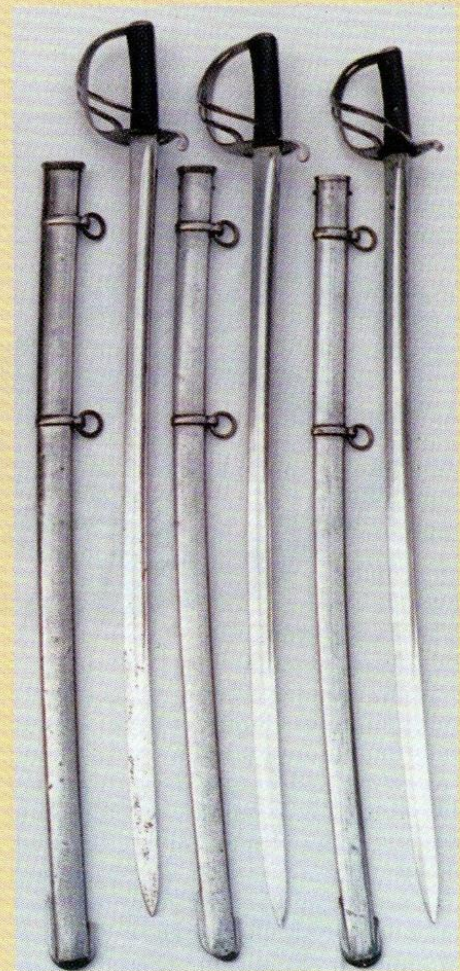


Fig 4. Three Pattern 1853 swords. The left hand standard example is stamped "REEVES" on the back of the blade and inspection stamps of "crown" over "B" over "13" on one flat. This example was a Royal Horse Artillery issue being stamped RHA above the quillon.

The centre sword is also a standard sword but one of the German made examples, though possibly hilted and scabbarded in England, the 35 and 1/2 ins. long by 1 and 3/8 ins. blade having the knights head stamp of C.R. Kirschbaum of Solingen-Oblihs, Prussia. It is also stamped with "crown" over "7" and has the official stamp marking it as "obsolete but fit for further service".

The right hand sword is a scarcer variant having a straight quillon and other minor differences; several swords of this type are in the Royal Armouries collection. The 35 and 1/2 ins. long blade is stamped "ENFIELD" on the back and "crown" over "E" over "6" on one flat. Both hilt and scabbard are engraved "HYC 168" and the scabbard is also stamped "ENFIELD".



Fig 5. Detail of the hilts of the swords in fig 4. Note the flutings incised into the face of the hilt of the right hand sword and its flat topped pommel.

the Royal Armouries consider is more likely to date to about 1890. It mainly consists of lists of objects arranged by Royal Armouries inventory numbers.

At the back is a separate "List of sealed pattern

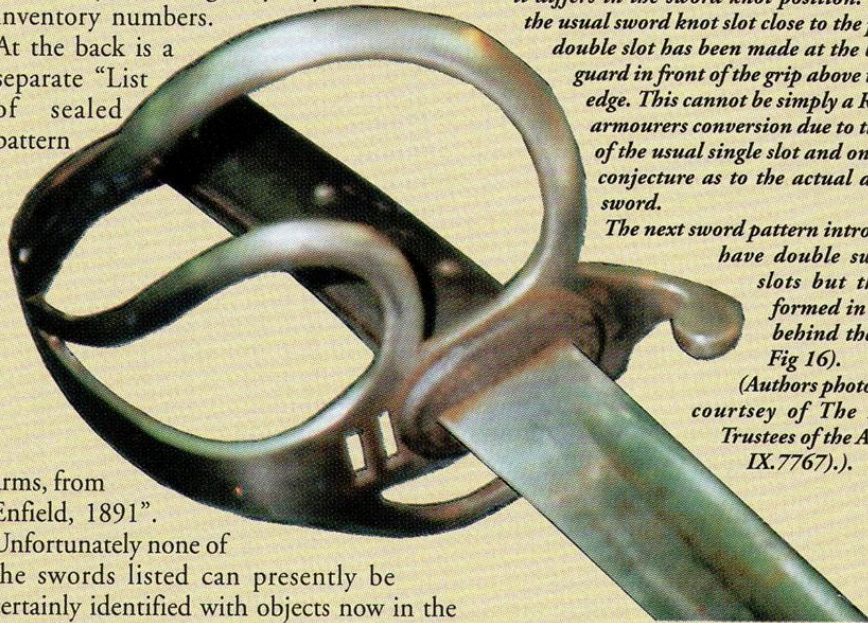


Fig 6. An interesting and possibly unique sword at the Royal Armouries. Although at first sight a perfectly standard example of the Pattern 1853 it differs in the sword knot position. Instead of the usual sword knot slot close to the pommel, a double slot has been made at the base of the guard in front of the grip above the cutting edge. This cannot be simply a Regimental armourers conversion due to the absence of the usual single slot and one can only conjecture as to the actual date of the sword.

The next sword pattern introduced did have double sword knot slots but these were formed in the guard behind the grip (see Fig 16).

(Authors photograph. By courtesy of The Board of Trustees of the Armouries, IX.7767).)

arms, from Enfield, 1891".

Unfortunately none of the swords listed can presently be certainly identified with objects now in the collections of the Royal Armouries but one entry (no.4 in the sequence for swords) reads: "Sword and scabbard for Yeomanry Cavalry Proposed by Mr. Wilkinson 21/7/53". Could this have been a prototype of the new sword, though Charles Reeves, as he designed and patented the new hilt, would perhaps have made the first example? I do know that Messrs Wilkinsons were making Special Pattern 1821 swords for the Yeomanry, with numbered blades, as late as 1862. For instance, their order numbers 11824 to 11839 and 11848 to 11859 were for the supply of better quality P1821 Light Cavalry troopers swords with wire bound fishskin covered grips to a Mr Ellam for a Yeomanry Unit in March 1862; this might be the type of yeomanry sword proposed by Mr. Wilkinson, the 1853 date merely being a confusing coincidence. This does tend to suggest the entry is for a Pattern 1821 variation. Of possible associated relevance, I also noted that entry 425 in the 1908 MoD Pattern Room Inventory is for "scabbard, volunteer, Light Cavalry, P1822; Approved 1860". Anyway, these observations are recorded as they may be of help to other collectors and researchers.

OTHER VARIATIONS TO THE STANDARD PATTERN

One of the Pattern 1853 swords with the straight quillon appeared a few years ago in a catalogue and I subsequently obtained another from auction (the right hand sword in Fig. 4). apart from the few held in the Royal Armouries these are the only examples I have seen and it should be noted that some Pattern 1821 Light Cavalry swords had also been made with straight quillons. There are at least twelve of the P1821 straight quillon type at the Royal Armouries (e.g.IX.345); ten are marked to the RHA but this does not

prove a special RHA variation as I have seen several others over the years not thus marked (e.g. Royal Armouries IX.7082, marked to the 10th Royal Hussars). Fig. 10 illustrates this P1821 hilt type though, in this instance, mounted on a good spear pointed, Pattern 1796 Heavy Cavalry Troopers blade; there are no markings and it is yet another variation of which I have seen others.

Only when further examining the Pattern 1853 purchase (Fig. 4, right hand sword) was I aware of several other differences; the same details as generally found on the Royal Armouries flat quillon P1853 swords:- 1) The 35 and 1/2 ins. blade is 1/8 ins. less across at the hilt. 2) The grip is 5/8 th ins. shorter than the standard and the grips are secured by four rivets in a staggered pattern instead of the usual five. 3) The straight quillon is wider. 4) The bars of the guard continue as incised lines up to the pommel. 5) The pommel is smaller and flat topped. (The pommels to the Royal Armouries examples are however slightly rounded).

This is not a privately made weapon, though stamped "HYC" on hilt and scabbard, as the blade has Government Inspection

stamps of "crown" over "E" over "6". Note that the standard Sealed Pattern sword has identical inspection stamps.

Figs. 11 and 12 illustrate yet another variation exactly as the Pattern 1853 form except for the guard being brass. It is stamped "MOLE" deeply into the face of the guard and the blade is stamped "MOLE" with "crown" over "B" over a number. It has been suggested by some that brass hilted P1853 swords were purchased in quantity by the Confederates for use in the Civil War and a drawing of one is included in "A Handbook of Confederate Swords" by Albaugh and Steuart and in the subsequent "Confederate Edged Weapons" by Albaugh. Although that author refers to thousands being sent into the South through the blockade another American researcher and author now suggests this may not be quite accurate especially as only a "handful" are known. To be fair to Albaugh if he is wrong, his work, published 50 years ago, was a pioneering effort in which he was breaking new ground. The books do

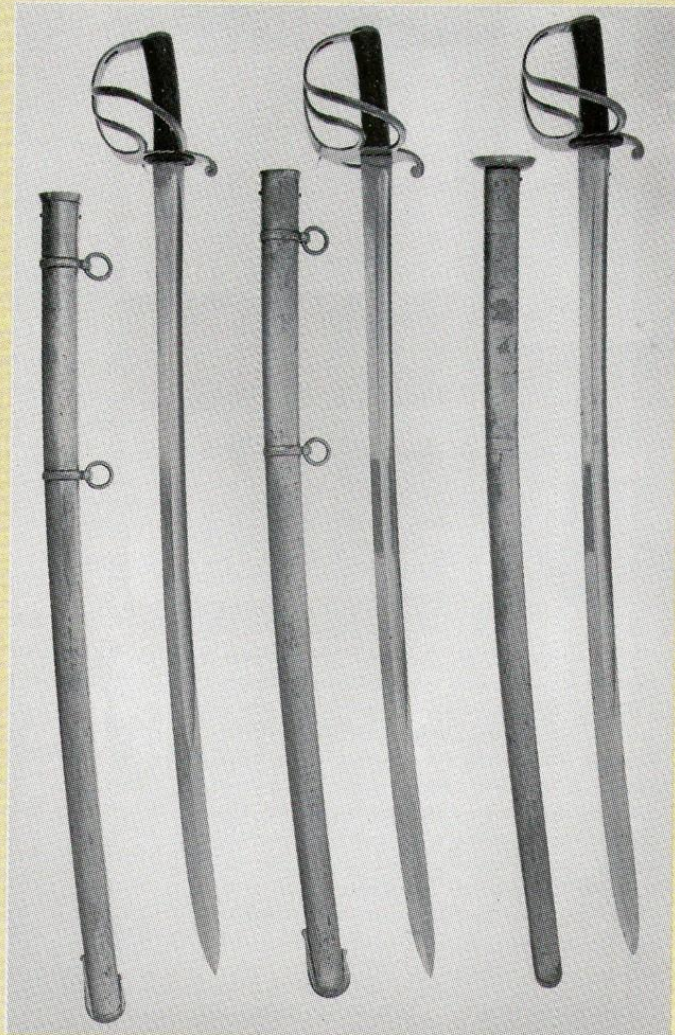
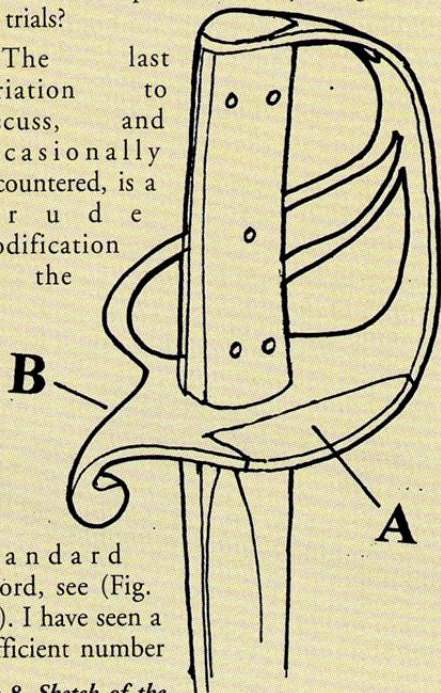


Fig 7. Three Pattern 1853 swords from the Royal Armouries collection. Both the left hand and centre swords are standard examples. The right hand sword is an interesting variant which, in the absence of any supporting documentary evidence, I can only assume was a design put forward with a view to making it easier for the mounted user to return his sword to the scabbard. The scabbard is engraved at the throat with "5L" over "152" and on the other side "1858", this latter may not be the date as the lettering is in the same style as the other side. Both the hilt and the ground down shoe are stamped "18". ((c) The Board of Trustees of the Armouries. IX.341, IX.340 and IX.339 respectively).

also illustrate the standard iron hilt of which, as he correctly states, the Confederates were supplied large numbers. Many of the iron hilted swords were apparently supplied by, and stamped, Isaac & Co, an English firm in existence for only a short while.

A photograph of a P1853 brass hilted sword stamped "MOLE" (no other markings are mentioned) is included in "*American Swords*" by Flayderman. He also illustrates an iron hilted example in its scabbard, with no markings but with a straight 33 and 1/2 ins. blade! (At the time of writing, I note that a similar example to the latter is entered in Wallis & Wallis sale 438, Lot 661, though with 30 ins. blade and in leather scabbard). The brass hilted sword in Fig 11 therefore remains as yet a mystery, its British Government Inspection markings indicating intended regular army use. Swords made privately for use by the Yeomanry, or possibly for a pre-Civil War American militia unit would not be thus stamped. So even if some brass hilted examples were used in the American conflict this example would not have been made specifically for that purpose. Also bear in mind that the combatants needed arms urgently and would not have put in a special order for the manufacture of brass hilts and that neither the British, French nor Belgian Governments permitted the sale to the American buyers of any of the extensive stocks of regulation ordnance stamped surplus arms in store. Could this Government stamped brass hilted sword therefore be a design proposed for general use but not adopted, a few only being made for trials?

The last variation to discuss, and occasionally encountered, is a crude modification to the



standard sword, see (Fig. 13). I have seen a sufficient number

Fig 8. Sketch of the modification to the inner guard loop of IX.339, (the right hand sword in Fig 7). This was presumably done to effect a seal between hilt and scabbard mouth. The guard is stamped "18" on the quillon. A:- Inner loop cut away and a solid piece neatly welded in. B:- When fitted, the scabbard protrudes slightly here. (Authors drawing. By courtesy of The Board of Trustees of the Armouries).

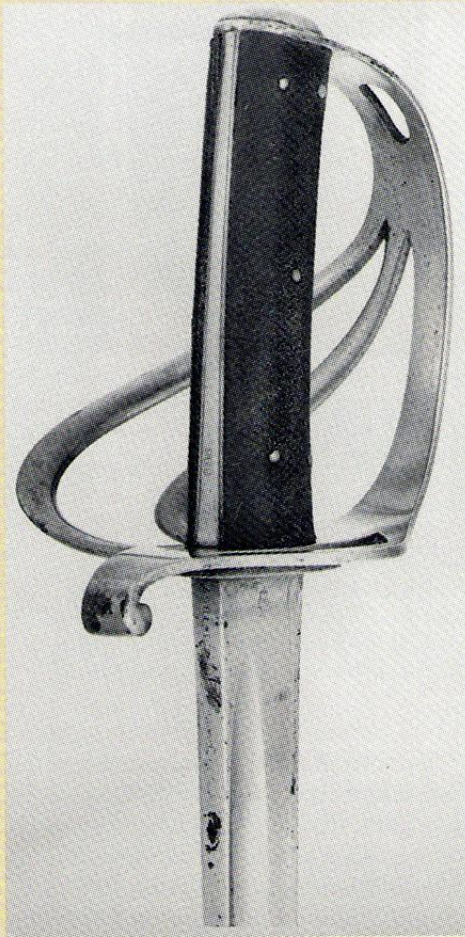


Fig 9. This sword is yet another minor variant having the divisions between the bars continued as engraved lines "in Pattern 1821 fashion" and as the straight quillon examples, though in this instance the quillon is downturned. However, the quillon is still wider and the disc terminal smaller than in the standard pattern. (c) The Board of Trustees of the Armouries, IX.7931).

of examples altered in this way to suggest an "accepted" conversion; but for what purpose? Sometimes the inner loop is cut off but the significant alteration is the shortening of the blade to about 34 ins., not by simply grinding down the point but by dismantling the hilt! The tang was then cut down in length, a new seat formed for the hilt in the blade and the leather grips refitted with new rivets through new drilled holes; a seemingly pointless exercise. Apart from several seen at Arms Fairs I did notice another example of this method of shortening in Messrs. Wallis & Wallis auctions Sale 351, Lot 1543, some ten years ago.

PRACTICE SWORDS AND TRAINING

Sword training and drill was carried out with regulation service swords, usually with rounded points and so the blade tips of relegated Pattern 1853 swords were rounded off for this purpose; an example at the Pattern Room confirms approval of this conversion, (Fig. 14), which appears to have been sealed in 1870, though I assume they were already in use. In addition, a specially made practice sword with a slender straight blade appears to have been introduced in 1856 (Fig. 15).

At intervals, new Official Instructions in the use of Arms were produced, usually a separate manual for each weapon. The sword instructions being followed in 1853 were probably those set out in the 1845 edition of the 1842 manual; instructions in the use of carbine, pistol and lance were also included in the subsequent 1858 edition. Revised editions were published for 1865 and 1871 at least, and there may have been editions printed between these dates; the same instructions are also contained in the "Manuals for field Artillery Exercises". There were also Rules and Regulations for the Sword Instruction of the Yeomanry Cavalry who required modified advice for dealing with mobs; whether Henry Angelo's manual of 1835 was still relevant, or updated, I do not know.

Before handling the sword on horseback the recruit was taken through various mounted exercises designed to supple the limbs. When proficient he was given a sword



Fig 10. A Pattern 1821 Light Cavalry hilt with the scarcer straight quillon. As we have seen, some Pattern 1853 guards are obviously copied from this hilt but are certainly not re-used P1821 guards as they are wider at the pommel to suit the P1853 sword.

and made aware of its strong and weak points; the "Fort" being the half near the hilt and the "Feeble" the half towards the point. A knowledge of this was essential in giving or guarding a cut as much depended on their proper application. Instruction was then given in basic handling of the sword and in the various modes of attack and defence, cuts and points. The exercises extended to mounted practice against each other when masks had to be worn and cuts and thrusts were not to be given "too strongly" to "avoid injury in friendly practice". The mounted exercises were



Fig 11. Another variant design. A Pattern 1853 sword by Robert Mole of Birmingham with 35 and ³/₈th ins. long blade. The guard is in brass and deeply stamped "MOLE". Its origin is still uncertain, this aspect is discussed further in the text.



Fig 12. Detail of the hilt of the brass hilted sword. An identical stamp is also seen in some standard iron hilts by Mole. The scabbard is missing but I am told of another example of this scarce variant still with its iron scabbard.



Fig 13. A modification to a standard Pattern 1853 sword occasionally encountered. The blade is shortened and sometimes the side loop is cut off as with this example.

usually carried out in files, first at a walk and then at a canter. Further practice was directed at rings and heads on posts which were "supplied to the cavalry Riding Houses for the Practice with Arms".

In addition to explaining how to deal with opposing sword wielding cavalry, instructions were also given on tactics against infantry and lancers. The advice on dealing with the latter warned that the lancer would endeavour to keep out of reach and thus frequently succeed in directing his point at your horse, making it unruly and leaving you exposed. You must therefore invariably endeavour to gain his right rear where he is less able to attack or defend.

The manuals contain so much more essential advice to the cavalryman that further discussion is rather out of the scope of this article.

SERVICE USE

Complaints were received soon after the first issues. In March 1854 the Commanding Officer of the 11th Hussars in Ireland reported that some of the new swords were inferior and badly tempered. He was apparently referring to the swords received in the past year thus indicating that the first issues were definitely made during 1853. Complaints were also received later from the 2nd Dragoons, then in the Crimea, of sword blades bending instead of penetrating the Russian greatcoats.

Enfield had investigated these complaints and initiated tests on swords currently being manufactured. These were observed by a committee of officers who found the swords to be of excellent quality; only about 1.45% having failed under test, and considered that the problem lay with the Regiments subjecting the swords to unauthorised and excessive tests which had weakened the blades.

It is interesting to observe that one of the complaints came from the 2nd Dragoons who, in the drawings by the French General Vanson made in October 1854, are shown still carrying the Pattern 1821 Heavy Cavalry sword; they were therefore only partially armed at this time with the Pattern 1853. Indeed, Vanson sketched most of the Cavalry Regiments in the Crimea in October 1854 and all the drawings I have seen show the men still carrying Pattern 1821 swords.

Other reports claimed the ineffectiveness of both the edge and point against the Russian greatcoats, striking with the hilt being more use! However, the swords in the Crimea were not entirely useless as many Russian casualties after the Balaclava actions were reportedly found badly cut about, some even having their skulls cut to the chin. Although I would suggest uncertainty as to whether the injuries were caused by the P1821 or P1853 swords, PRO WO 3/142 confirmed that by the end of the war all the cavalry in the Crimea were armed with the Pattern 1853.

The sword probably saw service in the numerous minor campaigns from 1856 to 1880 in Persia, India, Abyssinia and South Africa. It may also have been in use in Egypt and the Sudan up to 1885 being not officially declared "obsolete now being withdrawn" until being so confirmed in the "Tables of Small Arms 1891".

A group of the 13th Hussars are photographed wearing the sword in 1873 and the sword was certainly being carried by the 9th Lancers in the 2nd Afghan War as proved by a posed photograph of a large group of non-commissioned officers at Kabul in 1880; all swords worn are of the 1853 pattern in steel scabbards, except that at least one of them is in a leather scabbard with steel chape.

The Quartermaster General in his reports of 1882 to 1895 stated "In my own recollection swords of the Pattern 1854 (his date!) bought at the time of the Crimea were in store in thousands in 1877".

From about 1864, Pattern 1853 swords



Fig 14. A Pattern 1853 sword converted for practice use, the German made Kirschbaum blade being reduced to 35ins. by rounding off the tip; the attached label states "Practice 1860". However, the Sealed Pattern ledger entry refers to "Conversion from 1856", gives an approval date of 22/8/1870 and further states "sealed to govern the alteration of repairable swords (cavalry) in store for use as Practice Swords", this example actually appears in too good a condition to have been relegated to practice use! The guard has service markings to the 4DG and the scabbard is stamped "crown" over "E" over "6" and "Enfield" and with further stamps of "crown" over "GS" over "M". (Ministry of Defence Pattern Room, Nottingham).

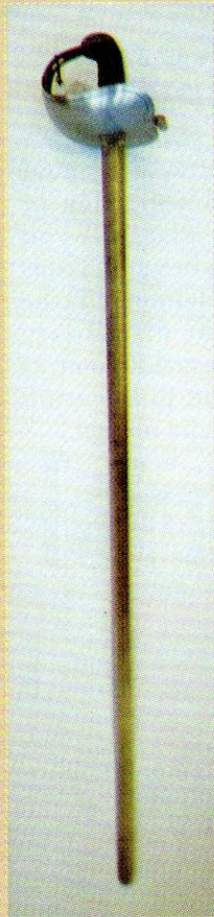


Fig 15. This practice sword has been included as the attached label states "ENFIELD 1856" and, in the apparent absence of any other records, it is assumed the sword was introduced for cavalry practice at this time even though its form is alien to the new sword. The guard and grip are standard Pattern 1821 Heavy Cavalry sword components but the 34 and 1/2 ins. long slender blade with rounded tip is specially made. There are four identical examples in the Royal Armouries stores except that one of those has no ears to the backpiece.

(Ministry of Defence Pattern Room, Nottingham).

selected, for patt/85, 82 Short, Practice or Waste.

SUMMARY

Most of the Royal Armouries Pattern 1853 swords described in this article came from the Weedon depot in Northamptonshire and readers may find the following summary of interest. Weedon was a store for the Royal Ordnance, not a factory, probably established when the Board of Ordnance ceased. Circa 1925 an inventory confirmed 30,575 military items; a separate one being made by the Admiralty in 1926. There was a distinct "museum" collection of weapons at Weedon which from November 1925 was "on(the)charge of the Tower Armouries". It seems likely that some or all of these weapons had earlier come from the Tower, some of them possibly being from a large number of sealed pattern weapons received at the Tower from Enfield in 1891. The Weedon collection was later administered as a loan from the Armouries. Some firearms had been later sent from Weedon to the Tower in 1927 following the recommendations of the War Office Committee on Military Museums and all the

objects remaining at Weedon were returned in, or shortly after, 1957.

A short description catalogue of the Weedon "museum" objects was printed in 1899 and typescript catalogues were prepared in 1927 and 1928 (copies in the Royal Armouries Library). All three catalogues have different inventory numbers for the individual objects and identification of ex-Weedon objects remaining in the Royal Armouries collections is an ongoing task for curatorial staff. The number on the swords can be painted or stamped, or typed or written on attached labels (or any combination of these) but all those so far positively identified seem to be those for the 1928 catalogue. There was also a separate "small arms collection" at Weedon which was regarded as belonging to the depot and which was dispersed, mostly to the National Army Museum and various Regimental Museums, in 1963-64.

The P1853 sword had a short 11-year official life, though a service use in excess of 35 years alongside subsequent patterns. A new form of solid homogeneous steel hilt (Fig. 16) was approved in December 1864 (LoC 887) to govern the repair of the iron P1853 hilts, the bars of which were liable to break. No direct approval of this pattern to govern manufacture of new swords can be traced but it appears to have been followed for that purpose, and the solid hilt only was made subsequently.

The Royal Horse Artillery objected to the P1864 hilt and was allowed, by a War Office order in 1876, to retain the P1853 sword, which remained their official weapon until the introduction of the Pattern 1890 sword.



Fig 16. Pattern 1864 Cavalry Trooper's sword, this example being the Sealed Pattern. The guard is neatly engraved - "APP/D By S. OF S. 3/12/1862. 57. 24. 3542"

The 35 and 1/2 ins. Blade is stamped "crown" over "E" over "6" on one flat and "crown" over "GS" over "M" over "17/12/1863 on the other. The bowl guard was introduced in December 1863 to replace broken P1853 guards which were liable to breakage and as well as overcoming the problem of broken guards it also gave better protection to the hand.

(Ministry of Defence Pattern Room, Nottingham).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thanks also to Mr John Thillman and Mr Jean Binck who enlightened me on the matter of weapon procurement by the Civil War buyers.

I am also indebted to the late Mr John Arlett of Wilkinson Sword Ltd for information provided.

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