

The Pattern 1877 Officer's Sword of the 6th Dragoon Guards (Carabiniers)



S. J. Goodyear

The 6th Dragoon Guards was one of the very few regiments of cavalry to adopt its own unique form of officers' guard. It was introduced late in 1877, and although the reason for its existence is unclear it was perhaps the result of the colonel of the regiment wanting to add some 'panache' to what he felt was a superior military body. It is also worth noting that for many years prior to this the regiment had been equipped as light dragoons (although still with the function of heavy cavalry) and would thus have carried the P1821/45 'three-bar' light cavalry sword (see below).

The two officers commanding at this time were Colonel (General) Henry Richmond Jones and Lieutenant-Colonel (later Lieutenant-General) Sir John Fryer, so it seems likely that they would have had a hand in the adoption of the new guard, and indeed Fryer's signature of approval is present on Wilkinson's pattern drawing (see below). He entered the army in 1860 as a Cornet in the 6th Dragoon Guards, and later commanded the regiment from 1877 to 1882, which included its operations in the 2nd Afghan War (1878 to 1880).

These are quite rare swords (for reasons I shall go into later – see Appendix 2), and are thus much sought-after by many collectors of regulation British military swords.

The pattern was formally accepted for issue on the 7th of December 1877, as evidenced by the official pattern drawing from Henry Wilkinson's records (Plate 1).



Plate 1.

Due to the pattern being adopted so late in the year, Wilkinson only made two of these swords in 1877, the first being purchased by Lord Greenock, and the second by Captain Alfred Weston (see Appendix 1)

whose actual sword is illustrated in the cover photograph, and also in plates 2 - 4. Note that these two swords are consecutively numbered in the Wilkinson ledger.

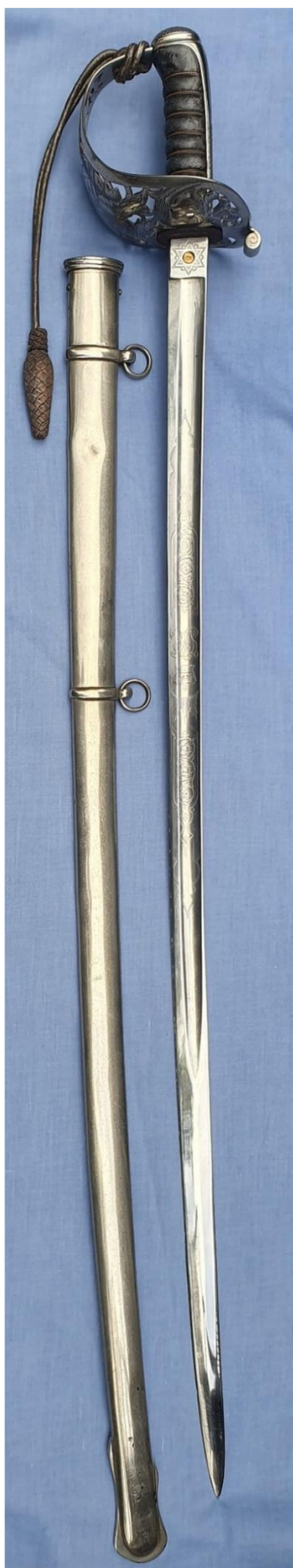


Plate 2.



Plate 3.



Plate 4.

As previously mentioned, these swords are now quite scarce, and there are likely two main reasons for this:

- 1) The pattern was used solely by the 6th Dragoon Guards, and only for 33 years from 1878 to 1911 (1877 has been discounted as the pattern was introduced so late in the year – see Appendix 2 for an analysis of the possible total numbers produced during this period).
- 2) Officers were usually only obliged to adopt a new pattern once their existing sword had worn out, or become unserviceable in some way. Swords were expensive items and thus there were probably some officers within the regiment at the time of the change who chose to retain their old swords, and perhaps others who joined the regiment later and brought their old swords with them. As previously mentioned, the 6th DGs had previously carried the light cavalry officers' P1821/45 three-bar hilted sword, an example of which is illustrated in plates 5-7. However, the standard heavy cavalry sword pattern at the time was the full-guard pattern 1821/45, which merged the hilt of the earlier P1821 (with pipe-back blade) with the later fullered form of blade that became prevalent from the mid-1840s onwards (see plates 8-10).



Plate 5. P1821.



Plate 6.



Plate 7.



Plate 8. P1821/45.



Plate 9.



Plate 10.

In summary, the pattern 1877 sword is basically the same as any other regulation heavy cavalry officer's sword of the period, with the notable exception of the guard decoration.

I have encountered very few examples of the pattern 1877 that have any regimental attribution etched onto the blade, so perhaps the special guard was generally viewed as a sufficient 'statement' and therefore many of the blades fitted to them merely required a 'normal' etch.

The only significant changes to the pattern 1877 hilt were the adoption of a fully chequered backpiece (backstrap) in c1896, and the adoption, after 1901, of the Tudor crown above the regimental number '6'. This latter revision came about after the accession of Edward VII (see plates 12 – 14 for an example). This change is also visible in the guards at the bottom centre and bottom right of Plate 11, and in plate 15.

Although the general form of the guard decoration remained the same during the period in question, the finer details varied considerably, depending on the manufacturer. The following are some examples of these variations:



Plate 11.



Plate 12. Blade is marked ERVII.



Plate 13.



Plate 14.

One final point of detail that is worthy of note. Dragoon regiments were initially formed as mounted infantry, not cavalry, and would thus have originally been armed with muskets (hence the 6th's epithet, 'The Carabiniers'). Makers clearly kept up to date with equipment changes within the army, as evidenced by their changing of the Martini-Henry rifle on the Victorian guard on the left of plate 15 to the (then) more modern Lee-Enfield rifle on the Edwardian example on the right.



Plate 15.



Plate 16. Illustration by Richard Simkin (1850-1926) of a 6th Dragoon Guards officer, c1890.



Plate 17. Another, by Harry Payne (1858-1927), c1905.

Acknowledgements

The four complete swords illustrated are from my own collection. However, I wish to express my gratitude to Bob Hedger (of Michael D Long Ltd.), Patrick Bondurant and Stephen Home for permitting me to use photographs of their guards.

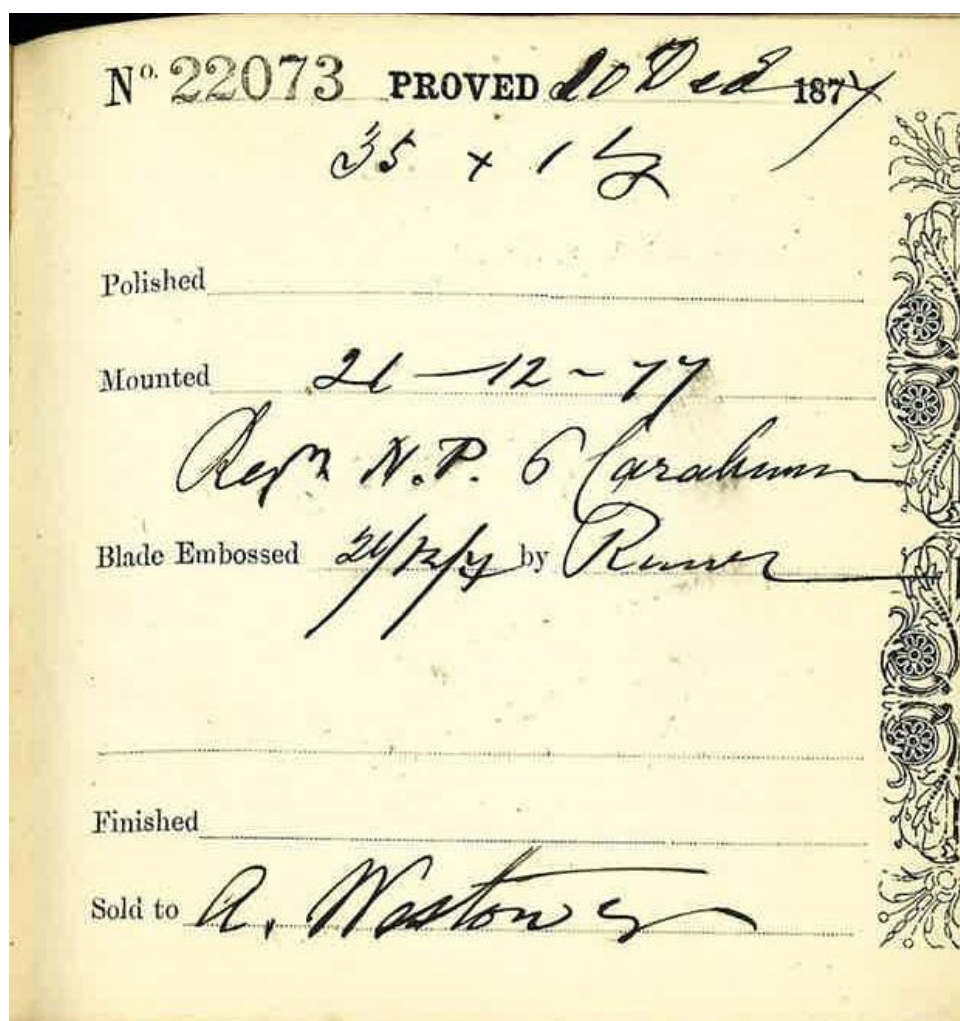
My thanks are also due to Tom Thomas for his valuable assistance in estimating typical regimental annual turnover of officers during this period, and to Steve Langham (of Langham's Sword Research) and Chris Scott (of Great Scott Antiques) for reviewing this article and providing valuable feedback.

Very few animals were harmed during the writing of this article.

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Appendix 1

The Wilkinson records note Weston's sword as being 'Regm N.P. 6 Carabiniers [regimental nickel-plated], Sold to A Weston Esq.'. It also states that it was mounted and embossed on the 20th of December 1877. Interestingly, it incorrectly notes the blade dimensions to be 35" x 1½". It is actually 34½" x 1", which was usually described by Wilkinson as a 'medium weight' sword.



The sword is in remarkable condition, and it retains most of its original nickel plating to both the outside of the guard and the scabbard. It has been neatly service sharpened, and indeed Weston served with the 6th DGs from 1876 to 1888, seeing active service in India including a stint stationed at the Khyber Pass:

"Captain Weston served as Adjutant of the Carabiniers [6th Dragoon Guards] in the Afghan war in 1879-80, and took part in the expeditions into the Lughman Valley and against the Wuzereee Khugianis, and at the attack and destruction of the villages of Nargozi, Arab Kheyl, and Joka; was Staff Officer and Provost Marshal of the 2nd Movable Column, Khyber Line Force, from 25th May to 11th Aug. 1880 (Medal)."

His period of service in Afghanistan means that the aforementioned Lieutenant-Colonel John Fryer would have been his commanding officer at this time.

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6th Dragoon Guards (*Carabiniers*).

[Mhow, Bombay.
Depot, Canterbury.]

Years' Ser.		"BLENHEIM" "RAMILLIES" "OUDENARDE" "MALPLAQUET" "SEVASTOPOL" "DELHI"					
Full Half Pay.		"AFGHANISTAN, 1879-80."					
		Colonel.—George Calvert Clarke, ¹ CB. Ensign, P ₃₀ May 34; Lt. P ₇ Oct. 36; Capt. P ₂₀ Sept. 39; Bt. Major, 11 Nov. 51; Bt. Lt. Colonel, 12 Dec. 54; Major, 26 Feb. 58; Colonel, 23 Apr. 60; Lt. Colonel, 31 March 66; Major General, 6 March 68; Lieut. General, 1 Oct. 77; General, 1 July 81; Colonel 6th Dragoon Guards, 4 Oct. 80.					
27	1/12	Lieutenant Colonel.—James Dennis, ⁴ Commanding the Regiment, 1 July 87; Cornet, P ₅ March 61; Lieut. 12 Oct. 68; Capt. 10 June 74; Major, 1 July 81; Lt. Colonel, 25 Oct. 85.					
		CORNET OR 2ND LIEUT.		LIEUT.	CAPTAIN.	BREV. MAJ.	MAJOR.
MAJORS.							
18	...	William Henry MacGeorge.....	P ₁₃ July 70	28 Oct. 71	13 July 77	.....	5 July 82
25	...	Douglas Alexander Graham Cunningham ham Graham ⁵	P ₂₀ Feb. 63	P ₂₈ Oct. 64	16 Aug. 73	.....	19 July 82
15	...	Thomas Cole Porter ¹¹.....	.....	24 Feb. 73	5 Oct. 78	.....	17 Mar. 86
22	1 1/2	Robert Stevenson.....	P ₁ Mar. 64	18 Dec. 67	P ₃₀ June 69	.....	5 July 82
CAPTAINS.							
14	...	Alexander Sprot ¹³.....	.....	28 Feb. 74	26 Apr. 82		
15	...	Thomas Rich. Fra. Brabazon Hallows, ¹¹ Adjutant Bucks Yeomanry Cavalry.....	.....	12 Nov. 73	5 July 82		
12	...	Alfred Weston, ¹⁴ Station Staff Officer, Dalhousie.....	.....	1 April 76	5 July 82		
13	...	Percy Hugh Hamon Massy, ¹⁵ Adjutant Berkshire Yeomanry Cavalry.....	.....	11 Feb. 75	19 July 82		
14	...	William Edward Phillips ¹⁶.....	.....	23 Apr. 74	17 Apr. 82		
10	...	Henry Mostyn Owen, ¹⁷ Adjutant 3 Feb. 86... p.s.c. Edward Cecil Bethune, ¹⁸ Garrison	30 Jan. 78	1 July 81	4 Dec. 86		
13	...	Instructor, Bangalore.....	.....	10 Sept. 75	1 Feb. 84		
10	...	Frederick Henry Arthur Des Vœux ⁶	16 Feb. 78	1 July 81	1 July 87		
8	2	Francis Sudlow Garratt ⁷	1 May 78	1 July 81	3 Oct. 87		
LIEUTENANTS.							
9	...	Montagu Cradock ²⁰	6 Aug. 79	1 July 81	Lieut. Brittlebank served in the Afghan war in 1879-80, and was present with the expeditions into the Lughman Valley and against the Wuzereee Khugianis, and at the attack and destruction of several villages (Medal).		
7	...	Francis Loder Beddy.....	23 April 81	1 July 81			
6	...	Arthur Cochrane Hamilton.....	.....	10 May 82			
6	...	Fitz James Fleming ²¹.....	.....	16 Dec. 82			
5	...	John Robert Donne.....	.....	25 Aug. 83			
3	...	Clarence Arthur Osborne.....	.....	6 May 85			
2	...	Thomas Wootton Blakeway.....	.....	30 June 86			
2	...	Henry Verco Platt.....	.....	28 July 86			
4	...	William Dixon Haddock Green.....	.....	30 Jan. 84			
SECOND LIEUTENANTS.							
1	...	William John Chesshyre Butler.....	5 Feb. 87				
1	...	Alfred Percy Browne.....	5 Feb. 87				
1	...	William Percy Burnell Ward.....	5 Feb. 87				
1	...	Thomas Steward Barton.....	5 Feb. 87				
1	...	Daniel Pearce Sunderland.....	17 Aug. 87				
26	2/12	Paymaster.—John Cooke, 14 April 82; Ens. P ₂₂ Oct. 61; Lt. P ₂₀ Nov. 67; Capt. 12 Feb. 73; Major, 1 July 81.					
10	...	Riding Master.—William Busby Mayes, 21 Aug. 78; Hon. Lieut.					
7	...	Quarter Master.—Joseph Brittlebank, ²² 13 April 81; Hon. Lieut.					
Blue—Facings White.—Agents, Messrs. Cox & Co. Embarked for India, 30 December 1877.							

¹ General Clarke served the Eastern campaign of 1854-55 with the Scots Greys, including the affair of M'Kenzie's Farm, battles of Balaklava (sabre cut on the neck), Inkerman, and Tchernaya, siege and fall of Sebastopol (Medal with three Clasps, Brevet of Lt. Colonel, Knight of the Legion of Honor, 5th Class of the Medjidié, and Turkish Medal).

⁴ Lt. Colonel Dennis served in the Boer war in 1881.

⁵ Major Graham served with the Carabiniers in the Afghan war in 1879-80, including the affair at Ali Boghan under Lt. Colonel Fryer, and the expeditions against the Wuzereee Khugianis and to the Hissarik Valley, under Lt. General Bright (Medal).

SECOND LIEUTENANTS.		
1	...	William John Chesshyre Butler 5 Feb. 87
1	...	Alfred Percy Browne 5 Feb. 87
1	...	William Percy Burnell Ward..... 5 Feb. 87
1	...	Thomas Steward Barton 5 Feb. 87
1	...	Daniel Pearce Sunderland..... 17 Aug. 87
26	^{3/12}	<i>Paymaster</i> .—John Cooke, 14 April 82; <i>Ens.</i> P22 Oct. 61; <i>Lt.</i> P20 Nov. 67; <i>Capt.</i> 12 Feb. 73; <i>Major</i> , 1 July 81.
10	...	<i>Riding Master</i> .—William Busby Mayes, 21 Aug. 78; <i>Hon. Lieut.</i>
7	...	<i>Quarter Master</i> .—Joseph Brittlebank, ²² 13 April 81; <i>Hon. Lieut.</i>
Blue— <i>Facings</i> White.— <i>Agents</i> , Messrs. Cox & Co. <i>Embarked for India</i> , 30 December 1877.		
¹ General Clarke served the Eastern campaign of 1854–55 with the Scots Greys, including the affair of M'Kenzie's Farm, battles of Balaklava (sabre cut on the neck), Inkerman, and Tchernaya, siege and fall of Sebastopol (Medal with three Clasps, Brevet of Lt.Colonel, Knight of the Legion of Honor, 5th Class of the Medjidie, and Turkish Medal).		
⁴ Lt.Colonel Dennis served in the Boer war in 1881.		
⁵ Major Graham served with the Carabiniers in the Afghan war in 1879–80, including the affair at Ali Boghan under Lt.Colonel Fryer, and the expeditions against the Wuzereee Khugianis and to the Hissarik Valley, under Lt.General Bright (Medal).		
⁶ Captain Des Vaux served with the Carabiniers in the Afghan war in 1879–80, and took part in the expeditions into the Lughman Valley and against the Wuzereee Khugianis; was also present at the attack and destruction of the villages of Nargozi, Arab Kheyl, and Joka (Medal).		
⁷ Captain Garratt served with the Carabiniers in the Afghan war in 1879–80 (Medal).		
¹¹ Major Porter and Captain Hallows served with the Carabiniers in the Afghan war in 1879–80, including the affair at Ali Boghan under Lt.Colonel Fryer, the expeditions into the Lughman Valley and against the Wuzereee Khugianis and to the Hissarik Valley, and at the attack and destruction of the villages of Nargozi, Arab Kheyl, and Joka (Medal).		
¹³ Captain Sprot served with the Carabiniers in the Afghan war in 1879–80, including the engagement with the Mohmunds at Dakka (Medal).		
¹⁴ Captain Weston served as Adjutant of the Carabiniers in the Afghan war in 1879–80, and took part in the expeditions into the Lughman Valley and against the Wuzereee Khugianis, and at the attack and destruction of the villages of Nargozi, Arab Kheyl, and Joka; was Staff Officer and Provost Marshal of the 2nd Movable Column, Khyber Line Force, from 25th May to 11th Aug. 1880 (Medal).		
¹⁵ Captain Massy served with the Carabiniers in the Afghan war of 1879–80, and took part in the expedition against the Wuzereee Khugianis (Medal).		
¹⁶ Captain Phillips served in the Afghan war in 1880 (Medal).		
¹⁷ Captain Owen served with the Carabiniers in the Afghan war in 1879–80, including the engagement with the Mohmunds at Dakka and the expedition against the Wuzereee Khugianis (Medal).		
¹⁸ Captain Bethune served in the Afghan war of 1878–80, and was present in the operations around Cabul in December 1879 (Medal with Clasp). Served with the 92nd Highlanders in the Boer war of 1881.		
²⁰ Lieut. Cradock served with the Carabiniers in the Afghan war in 1879–80, and took part in the expeditions into the Lughman Valley and against the Wuzereee Khugianis, and was present at the attack and destruction of the villages of Nargozi, Arab Kheyl, and Joka (Medal).		
²¹ Lieut. Fleming served in the Afghan war of 1879–80 with the Carabiniers.		

Appendix 2

I have put together some tentative conclusions as to why examples of this sword are so hard to find. Obviously, a pattern that was only ever used by one regiment is inevitably going to be much rarer than the standard pattern. However, I thought it might be interesting to deduce how many swords of this particular pattern were likely to have been sold, and I have reached a speculative conclusion.

The first thing to do was try and get a feel for what the typical annual officer 'churn' might be for a regiment, particularly cavalry. Obviously, officers were continually joining regiments after others were transferred elsewhere/left the service/retired.

So, what was the magnitude of these changes? It seemed certain that the 'purchase system' would skew any results massively, therefore only data for the post-Cardwell Reforms era was used. This figure proved to be in the region of four new entrants per annum.

Thus, assuming that all new officers purchased the new pattern on joining the regiment, and all existing officers immediately converted to the new pattern, then the probable maximum number of swords purchased would be around 158.

26 original officers

Turnover of 4 new entrants per annum = $33 \times 4 = 132$

Total = 158

However, as will be seen, I have estimated that it is more likely that ≈ 138 swords were sold.

This assumes a complement of 25 commissioned officers at any one time (which seems fairly typical for cavalry regiments of the period), plus 1 for the Colonel in Chief, and that...

a) when the change happened, only some of the officers serving with the regiment immediately converted to the new pattern. Note that, at this time in the British army, when a new pattern was introduced officers were usually not required to replace their existing swords until they became unserviceable in some way.

b) no officers leaving the regiment gave/sold their swords to a new incoming officer.

Note that there were least two officers that were killed in action during this period, one in Afghanistan and one in South Africa, plus a few losses from disease. At the time it was quite common practice for the victims' possessions to be auctioned to other officers within the regiment, but as I am unsure of the fate of their swords I have ignored this relatively insignificant number.

Estimate of numbers produced

Assume 26 officers at any one time

Introduction of pattern (December 1877) and therefore, realistically...	1878
End of pattern (introduction of the P1912)	1911
Years in service	33
Total new officers in that period, assuming per annum turnover of 4	132
Plus original officers (26 x 25%)*	6
Possible maximum total of swords made	138
Less speculative loss through neglect	-20
Final total of swords remaining	118

*Assumes that many retained their existing swords.