

## MEDIEVAL ARROWHEADS

The arrowheads used in the medieval period can be divided into two main groups:-  
Barbed and Non-Barbed.

### Barbed Broadheads

All the heads illustrated were used in a war situation but the barbed heads were used for hunting small or large game because they have cutting edges which would cause any strike to the body to bleed deeply. They were pinned to the shaft through the socket to prevent them being lost easily as they would have been just as expensive to make in those days as they are today. The heads included in this group are as follows:-

#### Type 16 Barbed head.

This head was used for both hunting and war although evidence suggests that it was developed from the curved broadhead for war use in the late medieval period. It was designed to give the maximum penetration and maximum cutting power, that would inflict a deep wound on the enemy. There are many variations of this type of head both in shape and size. On some the barbs are so small as to be hardly classed as barbs but more like raised edges along the sides. This is the type of head that was more than likely fitted to the shafts of the Mary Rose arrows and the Westminster arrowhead.

#### Type 15 Devizes Swallowtail Broadhead.

This long barbed broadhead was used for hunting large game because it not only flew well but also cut a deep wound. The long barbs gave the maximum length of cutting edges with the minimum weight and wind resistance when in flight

#### Type 14 Large Curved Broadhead.

This is the largest of the heads illustrated and was used for hunting large game such as deer or bear. It would have been used at short distances, where possible, to utilise its maximum cutting power. It was also used in the war situation to shoot at the horses and cause severe bleeding and immobility.

#### Type 13 Small Broadhead.

This small straight broadhead was used for hunting small to medium size game and also in the war situation for shooting at men and horses.

#### Straight Broadhead.

This hunting head was used for hunting large game such as boar or deer.

#### Curved Broadhead.

This type of head was also used on large game such as boar or deer and would give a much deeper cut than the straight broadhead.

#### Type 3 Barbed head.

This head was used extensively in the early medieval period for both war and for hunting small game. The long socket would allow deep penetration inflicting the maximum damage to the enemy or quarry.

#### Type 2 Anglo-Saxon Broadhead.

#### Type 1 Anglo-Saxon Broadhead.

These two heads were used for war purposes and for hunting game and were popular throughout the medieval period. These heads have been used for hunting in America and "a 28 metre shot, not well placed, hitting the bone of the animal, in this case a boar, cut through the bone and felled it enough for a second shot". Also "a 24 metre downward shot on an elk from a high slope did not hit the vital area but half of the neck, did not deflect but cut through, wounding the animal enough to get a second successful shot."

I have included these two types in this group as they are both broadheads with long cutting edges even though they are not barbed.

### Non Barbed heads

These heads are the true war heads used in battle to inflict the maximum damage to the enemy. Most of the heads found do not have a pin hole in the socket for fixing them to the shaft because on the whole they were only going to be shot once and a head left in the body when the shaft was pulled out would help increase the mortality rate. It is possible that the ends of the shafts were tapered to take the heads but the heads were not put on until shortly before the battle took place. It has been found that when fitting these heads a hard push and twist is often sufficient to secure the head to the shaft.

#### Type 12 Triangular Bodkin.

This head was used against knights in plate armour and would penetrate the armour if shot at close range.

#### Type 10 War Bodkin.

This was one of the most common war bodkins. It could be either the long form or the short form and the socket size varied between 5/16" diameter to 1/2" diameter. It would penetrate chain and plate armour at long and short range.

#### Type 9 Bodkin.

This warhead was used in the Roman period as well as in the medieval period and was designed to penetrate most types of body armour.

#### Type 7 Needle Bodkin.

This warhead was popular in the early medieval period and was designed to penetrate mail. It is a direct development of the Viking leaf shaped warheads used throughout that period. Tests carried out have shown that it was very effective and would pierce right through a body clad in mail. Tests have also shown that it will easily penetrate the modern flak jacket. The needle bodkin was made in a number of different sizes from small two inch long ones with 1/4" diameter sockets, to one eight inches long found in a castle moat in the Midlands.

Other bodkin heads that have been found are the Square, Conical, and Fluted Bodkins, all designed to pierce the body armour that was worn at that time.

The one head that does not fit neatly into either group is the Type 6 Forked head. It was a quite common head of the medieval period and much speculation has been given as to its uses. One of the theories is that it was used to cut rigging on board ships. If this is so why were none found on the Mary Rose because she was putting out to sea to fight a ship battle. If it was used for this purpose then the rope would have to be very taut for the head to cut it. Also the head would be spinning and the chances of it hitting the rope at just the right angle would be rather low. I would be interested to know if anyone has carried out any tests of this nature and the results they obtained. Another theory is that it was used to shoot at the hind legs of the horses to cut the tendon and bring the horse down. This is not practical for the same reasons as the rope cutting and far more difficult to achieve. I think that the most plausible uses for this head are as follows:- 1) It was used for shooting at small game and birds because the two points would make it less likely to bury itself in the grass or undergrowth if the archer missed the target, or skid off the feathers of birds which ordinary points have been known to do. 2) In war it was used to shoot at the horses to inflict as much pain as possible to the animal which would then unseat its rider and cause confusion. I say inflict pain because as this head strikes it would tear the flesh which causes pain, unlike a broadhead which would cut like a sharp knife without causing immediate pain. This has been noted by hunters using broadheads who have shot deer which have continued eating after being hit, showing no sign of being struck by the arrow.

Further ballistic testing of arrowheads and the results can be found in the book "longbow" by Robert Hardy.

Hector Cole. December 2001