

The Fencer's, Dancer's, and Bearbaiter's Quarterly

The Newsletter of the Southwark and Westminster Trayn'd Bandes

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'Ever But in Times of Need At Hand'

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Upcoming Events

8-9 April 1995: The Raid On Mousehole, Newmarket VA. Call Jeff Morgan for information.

20-21 May 1995: Shapwick Whitsun Muster and Ale. Call Jeffrey Singman for information.

October 1994: St Mary's Muster, St Mary's City, MD. This is a major event for the 17c/ECW re-enacting crowd, and we are very interested in having a high-profile presence there in 1994. Call Jeff Morgan for information.

Shapwick weekends continue on the last weekend of every month. These generally involve some time on working on the alehouse (which we do in costume, as a good opportunity to practise persona), a workshop on some period skill, and a festive meal and socialising. Call Jeffrey Singman for details.

Tower Hamlets Report

Jeffrey L. Singman

As readers may recall, the previous issue of the FDBBQ included an article from our own Mickey O'Myatt on his participation in a re-enactment of the Siege of Gloucester with the Sealed Knot, the largest English Civil War re-enactment society in England, as a part of Lord Saye and Sele's regiment. At the end of June 1994, I had the opportunity to fall in with the Sealed Knot's Tower Hamlets regiment for two events, of which an account follows.

I arrived at Manchester airport on Friday 24 June, and promptly sped down the M6 (well, crawled, actually, in the midday English traffic, and in searing heat, which was to persist through most of the following two weeks) to Minster Lovell, Oxfordshire, the current home of Paul Eaglestone, the regimental commanding officer. I had some difficulty finding the place, as there was no sign indicating the name of the road (a common feature of English roads—I suppose that if one has to ask, one doesn't belong there), and the house itself is one of those with no number, but a name. After a few phone calls from Minster Lovell's watering establishments, I managed to triangulate onto the site, and arrived at last at Windrush House, a lovely nineteenth-century house which had belonged to one of the Chartists, where I was greeted by Paul's wife Christine; Paul arrived home from work only seconds later, and we spent the next few hours chatting, touring the grounds, having a bite, and packing up the cars. Then we set out for Cropredy.

To those familiar with the Civil Wars, and above all with the service of the London Trained Bands, the name Cropredy (pronounced with the stress on the first syllable) is certainly one to be conjured with. On 29 June 1644, King Charles' army met with a Parliamentarian force under Sir William Waller; the Parliamentarians overreached themselves, and almost met with

disaster, but a valiant stand by the Tower Hamlets regiment, posted as a rearguard at Cropredy Bridge, helped avert a catastrophe.

Cropredy today is a remarkably scenic Oxfordshire village, located a bit north of Banbury; it is built largely of the reddish local stone, and sports a fifteenth-century pub (of which the current landlord is a member of Tower Hamlets), and a church of which the newest features are to be dated to the sixteenth century.

Sealed Knot events are generally organised under the sponsorship of some other organisation; the custom is for the sponsor to provide the site and certain remunerations and expenses, in exchange for which they get the receipts of the admissions sold to the public. In this case, the sponsor was the village of Cropredy itself, and our activities took place in the context of a village fête, which included local craftspeople selling their wares, contests, a few small carnival rides, a ferret show, and the Adderbury Morris Men. All of this was set up in a field right on the east bank of the river, just south of the bridge (the original wooden bridge is long since gone, and there now stands a stone bridge in its place).

At the back of the field was the living history camp, divided into three separate sections for the various regiments, of which one belonged to Tower Hamlets. About two dozen of us were actually camped here, the rest being in a modern campsite on the north side of the road leading to the bridge. This camp had been in place for most of the week, with school parties coming during the day to be shown something about life at the time of the Civil Wars. On Saturday and Sunday the site was open to the paying public, and there were to be re-enacted battles on both days.

The Tower Hamlets encampment was exceeding well appointed, not only with handsome tentage but with a fine firepit which even included an oven. The rabbits suspended from the kitchen fly were a particularly delightful touch, and were later joined by pike fresh from the stream. These culinary arrangements were especially the work of

Tower Hamlets' own Bodger and his wife Madeleine, who deserve particular mention for having kept everyone most amply and deliciously fed all weekend.

My own accommodations were in a very handy little soldier's tent, on a straw pallet which I found not only quite comfortable but also surprisingly non-allergenic—the result, it was suggested, of the freshness of the straw. Paul had also seen to the rest of my kit. I had brought my own shirt, cap, breeches, stockings and shoes, but he provided me with the Tower Hamlets' Venice red coat and all the other equipment necessary for a musketeer.

Once comfortably set up in the camp, we repaired to the Red Lion (the fifteenth-century pub), where yours truly indulged in his traditional liquid dinner. The company was most congenial, the ale good, and I for one slept the sleep of the blessed that night.

On Saturday we made preparations to receive the public, which included issuing me with the name of Thomas Simpson, who was one of the soldiers in the Tower Hamlets regiment (these additional names were extremely confusing for one who had enough trouble trying to learn the names of several dozen new faces over the course of the weekend!). We spent the first part of the day taking turns on watch, lounging about the camp, and answering the questions of visitors.

In the afternoon we formed up across the road in the modern encampment, and marched across the bridge, and southwards through the village. The march was a thoroughly stirring experience: the thundering of the drums resounded from the stone houses to either side, and the people gathered by the side of the road to watch our progress, as our preacher enthusiastically harangued us to do the Lord's work, while we periodically shouted our various cries: 'No Bishops!', 'No Popery!', 'London and Liberty!', 'Christ, King and Parliament!', and 'A Pox on Master Hardcastle—And his Shed!' [This last alludes to a running joke in the regiment. Apparently at about this time in Tower Hamlets, there arose a court case when various residents

awoke one morning to find that an oversized and apparently irksome shed had appeared on the grounds belonging to a certain Master Hardcastle—complaints were lodged, and many of the complainants were later to appear on the rolls of the regiment.]

At length we came to a wooden bridge over the river which had been constructed for the occasion. It was time to enter into battle.

The re-enacted Battle of Cropredy Bridge was rather small by Sealed Knot standards—roughly three regiments or so on each side, for a total of perhaps some 150 combatants (at a rough guess). Almost all of these were foot soldiers, with only a handful of cavalry and perhaps one great gun on each side. This was of course good news for me, since it gave me a chance to figure out what how these things worked in a relatively orderly battle.

The regiment engaged in a firefight from the west side of the river, before advancing across, where we alternately fired and entered into hand to hand combat, without moving very much of anywhere. To attempt anything like a meaningful narrative of the battle would be futile, so I shall have to stick to a few general and isolated observations.

—Ironically, the conduct of the battle seemed in some respects rather less convincing as a recreation of seventeenth-century warfare than has been my experience in North American tacticals. This is principally because ranged weapons are virtually ignored. Every now and then some civic-minded individual will actually fall to the ground in the face of a murderous volley of musketry, but by and large the only means of getting a unit actually to take casualties is to hit personally convince them to fall down by landing a blow on their bodies or simply pushing them over. One of the consequences of this cavalier attitude to musketry (sorry!) is that units will frequently exchange volleys at a range of fifteen yards or less, a situation which would surely have been both murderous and suicidal in a real pike-and-shot battle. On the other hand, the hand-to-hand combat is closer

to the real thing than anything we are likely to see on this side of the Atlantic.

—Nobody actually tells you what to do when you go into hand-to-hand combat, so I will. As a musketeer, you club your musket. I had of course already learnt to do this, but having learnt it in North America, where one generally doesn't engage in real hand-to-hand, I had not learned that in England this also involves discarding your musket rest (which after all includes a rather nasty pointy bit at one end) and your slow match. Then you advance towards the enemy and try to poke him with your musket-butt. After receiving a most unpleasant blow on the right thumb (still slightly lumpy and sore even a month later), I realised that the Wise Musketeer, especially the North American Musketeer Who Is Not Anxious To Spend His Working Holiday In An English Hospital, always grasps his musket with both hands fairly close to the barrel. This gives you less control over the weapon, but gives you a better chance of parrying attacks with the musket rather than with your hands. You continue poking at selected opponents either until one of them gives you such a poke as suggests that it would be more fitting to fall to the ground than to be poked again, or until your commanding officer tells you to lay off the poor sods. This hand-to-hand combat is unquestionably one of the most enjoyable aspects of a Sealed Knot battle. My impression is that, by and large, it is competitive, but the competition does not seem to override the fun: people generally take their blows with good grace, and most everyone is a sport about falling a casualty when they are bested—indeed, many die with considerable flair.

—Pike combat occurs in two rather distinct forms. One is essentially the hand-to-hand style described above: the pikes have rubber heads, and pikemen jab at their opponents (as I was often jabbed at myself). The alternative is the 'comport-push', in which the pikes are raised up across the chest, the pike blocks advance to each other, and push until one side is bested (which usually involves a general collapse of the defeated

pikemen, and sometimes of the victors as well). The comport-push is probably the most dangerous aspect of a Sealed Knot battle. When two blocks of a dozen testosterone-crazed pikemen begin to push at each other, the whole mass begins to swirl, pikes are knocked askew, individuals lose their footing, and musketeers quickly leap out of the way, blessing their good fortune to be on the outside of this human maelstrom.

—The handling of mock casualties is very informal. The task usually falls to the ‘dummy musket’, ie. those musketeers not actually certified to use powder. Sometimes an individual will decide that a volley is too good to go unacknowledged, and will fall loudly and ostentatiously in response. Sometimes a conscientious officer will see a volley or cannonade coming, and ask someone to fall when it happens. And, of course, in the process of hand-to-hand combat, when anyone smacks you a solid one in the ribs, it is considered good form to sink painfully to the soil. The casualty lies peacefully for a while, catching his breath and hoping he is not lying in the path of a migrating pike-block. Sometimes a comrade, officer, or camp-follower will help the casualty to his feet, when it seems appropriate, or the casualty may simply rise at will if he is getting bored (in which case a gradual and painful revival seems the done thing), or he may simply stay there until the battle is over, as is most likely if he falls towards the end.

—The campfollowers of the regiment generally follow the troops onto the field, providing water and replacement match as needed. I’m not sure this felt very convincing.

—Both men and women participated in military activities, including the pike block. The musical corps of the regiments tended to be predominantly or exclusively female.

—In Tower Hamlets at least, the integration between the drums and other aspects of the regiment was rather limited. Some other regiments had fifes, which would be a pleasant addition for both the STB and the TH. By and large, there was much less

precision in the execution of drill than tends to be the case with us—they do not even march with the drumbeat. I am given to understand that this may be a reaction against a perceived modernity in the attitude of other regiments to drill. I am not convinced this is valid. After all, as early as the 1580s Arbeau is quite explicit about marching in step, and the precise detail of drill books like de Gheyn’s, as well as the importance of synchronisation when fifty men are whirling 18-foot poles about their heads, militate in favour of a reasonably exacting standard of drill. The gentlemen of the Artillery Garden must have been doing *something* with their time!

—As already mentioned, match is discarded when going into hand-to-hand combat. This would seem to be an argument in favour of issuing several lengths to each musketeer at the beginning of the combat.

—I highly recommend bringing a water vessel, and even a bit of bread into the battle. This not only gives one all the more sense of a real soldier’s experience (laden as he would be with certain essentials), but also provides welcome refreshment during the battle.

—For the myopic, I would *strongly* suggest investing in contact lenses. Going through the battles with poor eyesight is most frustrating: you miss much of the splendour and excitement of the occasion, and you are apt to annoy your officers by not recognising when they are telling you to do something.

—The actual risk involved is hard to quantify. There are invariably casualties in the course of any major battle, most especially of pikemen in a comport-push; heat exhaustion can be a significant risk too. Broken bones seem to be a typical injury. The SK medical services seem quite good, although of course any of us going over there would naturally be reluctant to have to make use of their ministrations! On the whole, it would seem advisable to fall in with the musket if possible, as this significantly reduces the risk.

—Apparently, it might actually have been possible for me to have fired live on the second weekend. Some sort of guest licence

seems to be available from the authorities, while the SK requires (from what I understand) that one (a) have served as dummy-musket in a battle and (b) pass some sort of competence and safety examination. Future visitors should look into this.

The course of the battle was generally unscripted—the only really predetermined parts were the beginning and the end. After an hour or so of confused action, our regiment withdrew to the bridge, and there was the firing of a salute and a minute of silence in memory of those who fell that June day 350 years ago (I myself had fallen as a casualty, and had ample opportunity, face planted in the soil of old England, to contemplate the fate of many who ended up in the same situation). Then we marched off the field and back to the camp (the short way this time!).

In the evening there was socialising in the beer tent, and an electrified folk band played for some traditional English dances.

On Sunday morning those who chose formed up and marched to Cropredy's church for a service, which the vicar led out of the prayerbook of 1552—I was sitting in the front row, and could see that it was an original. The parishioners had displayed a great enthusiasm for the occasion—they had decked the church with the most beautiful arrangements of flowers I have ever beheld, and some of them had even arrayed themselves in some form of seventeenth-century costume. After the service, most of the day was a repeat of Saturday; after the public left, we packed up, and I repaired again to Minster Lovell, where I spent the night as the guest of the Eaglestones.

On Monday I drove in to London, and in the afternoon did the 'Southwark Pilgrimage'. Very few sites remain: a portion of the Bishop of Winchester's palace, a museum dedicated to punishment and prostitution on the site of the Clink, a project to reconstruct the Globe, and Southwark Cathedral. The site of the Tabard Inn is now Talbot Yard, a seedy sort of alley. I did also have a chance to drop in on Southwark's local history library, and had a few pints with Tower Hamleteer Andrew

Fergal at the George, the last of Southwark's old inns. The original had been destroyed by fire, but this reconstruction of the latter part of the seventeenth century retains the characteristic form of the Tudor and Stuart inn, and is well worth a visit. Apparently TH often holds meetings here! Also during my time in London I visited the Tower and the Museum of London, perhaps the two most recommendable sites in London for people of our interests.

The following Saturday morning I made my way to Ripley Castle, about 45 minutes north of Leeds, for the Sealed Knot's Marston Moor event. For this event there was no living history camp—I, in my borrowed soldier's tent, was the only one to have anything like a period shelter; my bedding, on loan from the Eaglestones, was essentially modern, although I slept in my clothes, with wool blankets and my coat rolled up for a pillow.

This event was to have two battles each day: the Siege of York in the morning, and Marston Moor in the afternoon. As no London Trained Band regiment would have been at either of these, we were going Scottish for the weekend, as the Kyle and Carrick regiment of foot (that's Tower McHamlets to you!), recruited from the region south of Glasgow. It is testament to the quality of TH that we were considerably better decked out as a Scots regiment than many who do Scots all the time. In truth, we were resplendent, in our light blue bonnets (pulled forward over the eyes, not sideways like a beret, thank you!) and our dourly Calvinistic grey coats, marching under a St Andrews banner bearing the legend 'For Religion, Countrie, King and Covenant', and shouting 'Nae Bishops!', 'Nae Popery!', and the ever-popular 'Jesus and Nae Quarter!'.

The site for this event was the grounds of Ripley castle. The castle itself is a truly resplendent manor, surrounded in part by a sort of low curtain wall and dry moat (with a ready-made breach, which was to prove useful). Adjacent is the stone-built village of Ripley and Ripley church, which was standing

at the time of Marston Moor. The grounds also include some lovely large ponds well stocked with fish. In the morning we enacted an incident from the Siege of York, in which the attacking Covenanter army breached the city walls but were repulsed with heavy losses. We attacked the castle from across the moat, first exchanging musketry, then pouring down into the moat and clambering up through the breach. I fell a mock-casualty at the farthest point of advance, and spent the remainder of the scenario there, to be courteously plundered by the camp-followers (who were delighted to find my pouch full of bread), as I listened to the sound of combat between the defenders and the retreating Covenanters.

In the afternoon we formed up and marched to the sloping fields across the ponds and enacted the Battle of Marston Moor. This was by far the largest of the battles I had been involved in, with the combattants probably numbering a couple of thousands on a side, including some dozen or two dozen horse, and a large number of cannon, ranging in size from mere pop-guns to huge weapons which made the entire field tremble with their report. Our own unit was fairly sizable, with somewhat over 30 musket in two divisions, and about twenty pike in between. This battle lasted for around two hours from tip to tail, and was a physically demanding and altogether exciting experience. Tower Hamlets were called upon to do some especially hard service, rushing from one end of the Parliamentarian line to the other. The confusion of the afternoon was extraordinary—it was often impossible to hear the officers' commands (to their evident frustration), especially for those of us who were going unbespectacled. Altogether it was splendid fun.

That evening there was a rhythm-and-blues band in the beer tent, which I gave a miss; however, there was a good deal of interesting conversation to be had, and upon my return to camp after the evening's socialising, I heard the sound of bagpipes, which led me to a bit of pick-up country dancing.

On Sunday there was scheduled a re-enactment of the execution of Royalist prisoners in Ripley churchyard. I had decided to give the event a miss and take it easy, but there was a call for Kyle and Carrick to form up in the morning, and I duly took part. They marched us up through the castle and to the church, where we were posted on guard, and I realised that I was going to see the execution after all—from across the sights of my own musket barrel. The wait in the churchyard was quite interesting—part of the unit was kept on guard at the entrance, while the rest lounged among the gravestones, and the scene looked and felt much as it might have done 350 years ago. Some of the men discovered on examination that the church walls were heavily pockmarked in some places at about chest height—a most grim and vivid reminder of the original reality of the scene we were about to enact. I suspect I wasn't the only one there who experienced a certain wrenching feeling to reflect on it. At length the Royalist prisoners turned up—three sporting fellows if ever any were (one of them was actually a woman), gaily dressed and with a real flair for drama. During the wait we were swarmed by curious tourists, and had quite a good time explaining what we did and showing them how our equipment worked. After the church service was over, the firing squad formed up, and there was an exchange of hostile remarks between the two sides. The order was given, the Royalists cried 'God save the King!', and fell before a loud volley of musketry.

Our participation in this little drama was in lieu taking part in the morning battle; the afternoon battle was as before, albeit considerably more confused and somewhat larger in numbers. I also took time that afternoon to visit the merchants at length. It was almost heartbreaking to see what an extraordinary selection of wares were available. A person who knew what they were doing could outfit themselves quite authentically and fully from head to toe, and the prices were quite reasonable—significantly lower than what we are paying for the same

wares over here, probably due to the economies of scale in a much larger hobby.

After the afternoon battle people began to pack up and go, and it was with great regret that I left the congenial crew of Tower Hamlets. Later that week I did take an afternoon and evening to visit Bodger and Madeleine in Nottingham, where I was most warmly and generously hosted.

A few overall observations:

—The circumstances in England have allowed for battles of a sort which we will never see here, but to some degree the limits we face in North America have impelled us to place more emphasis on living history. Partly for this reason, I believe, the gender distribution of the membership in England is much more lopsided, while at our events there tends to be rough parity between men and women. It may be that other groups, both the ECWSA and smaller living history organisation, have given more attention to the living history aspects of their activities, but my impression is that the STB can justly claim to be among the finest amateur practitioners of living history for our period, particularly given the youth and limited size of the organisation.

—My foremost conclusion from my experience in England is that we have been most fortunate in falling in with Tower Hamlets. They are past question a capital bunch, with whom we have many values in common. I cannot possibly do justice to the warmth and friendliness with which I was welcomed among them, or to the enjoyment I had of their company. As well as being personable, I find them quite admirable: there is a great deal of talent, wit, and commitment to quality in the regiment. I strongly recommend that STB members make an opportunity to meet them if at all possible, and I hope some of them may be induced to journey to this side of the Atlantic so that we may have the opportunity to show them our own hospitality (indeed, I gather that quite a few are rather interested in the American Civil War—and have even been ACW re-enactors—so perhaps we might organise some

sort of a tour one of these days). Anyone interested in making contact with Tower Hamlets should get in touch with me (note also that if you want to participate in Sealed Knot events, you will need to become a member). I foresee a long and enjoyable association between our respective units...

Company Stores

—*The Elizabethan Handbook. A Manual for Living History c1588-1603.* Price: US\$12, CDN\$14; postage \$2.

—*A Seventeenth-Century Book of Games.* Price: US\$5, CDN\$6; postage \$2.

—*The Tabard Inn Songbook and Tape* (a collection of 30 rousing 16th-17th century songs). Price: US\$6, CDN\$8; postage \$3.

—Elizabethan Coins. Halfpennies: US\$.15 ea., Pennies: \$.20.

Orders and inquiries may be directed to Jeffrey Singman. Prices above are for STB members.

New Suppliers

Bodgeramour. Dave Hodgson, 129 Kent Rd., Mapperly, Nottingham NG3 6BS ENGLAND; (0602) 525 711. Bodger is a member of Tower Hamlets, but I would recommend his work even if he weren't. Knives, spoons, weaponry, pins, and pretty much anything else you can think of.

Quartermasterie. Ian Skipper, 32 Ladbroke Rd., Enfield, Middlesex, EN1 1HX; (081) 367 5877. Carries coins, accessories, certainly to be relied on for authenticity.

Bailiff Forge. J. E. Denbigh, Unit 53, Colne Valley Workshops, Linthwaite, Huddersfield HD7 5QG; (0484) 846 973. Carries a good line of swords, scabbards and hangers, swords around £80, +£25 for good finish.