

A bayonet for the Earl of Aylesford's Great Packington Volunteers

Derek Complin, Kingston, Canada © 2024



A particularly interesting period in European history occurred as many countries competed with each other to secure their place in the world. This bayonet appears in a number of books dedicated to the subject, including *British & Commonwealth Bayonets**, where author Ian Skennerton writes:

"The strong support for the Volunteer movement (early 1800s) was largely as a result of France's expansionism and successive military victories and the military enthusiasm of the British people extended to all social classes; the learned and wealthy were no exception, in fact, they donated to help equip many of the units. Volunteers were organizing and arming themselves throughout the country and in many instances, no expense was spared to acquire what was considered to be the best equipment available. This even escalated to open rivalry between some groups, and some distinctive sword bayonets have been attributed to particular units during this period. . . B100 (the subject of this example) is different again, and possibly slightly later in vintage, as it is very similar to the Sappers & Miners sword bayonet, with a curved knuckle bow. This bayonet is in the tower collection, and is documented as having been used by the Great Packington Volunteers, who were organized by the Earl of Aylesford, which fixes onto a Baker type rifle made by S. Wallis of Birmingham, an example of which is also at the Tower.

During the Napoleonic Wars, Britain was allied with the German States and it was some German designs that influenced British sword bayonets of this period. Therefore, any study of this age will be greatly assisted by an understanding of the appropriate German swords and bayonets. This period, with its variety of sword, socket and knife or dagger bayonets, represents the Golden Age because of the variety and quality of edged weapons manufactured. Some of the Ordnance contractors were supplying bayonets to the Volunteers, which was a more lucrative market than Ordnance Board contracts. . . "

An example of this bayonet was used for illustration in *British Military Bayonets* (R.J.Wilkinson Latham, 1967), and in *The Bayonet Book* (John Watts & Peter White, 1975). After nearly fifty years of collecting, one finally came my way.

With a slim, 660mm (26") single edge blade, there is a certain elegance to it despite the ungainly hilt. The socket dimensions of this example differ slightly from those recorded in *BCB*, with a length of 110mm, slot to muzzle of 59mm and a muzzle ring diameter of 23mm.



The hilt is particularly well made and finished. The knuckle bow is quite small, attesting to the smaller stature and size of men some 200 years ago.

Two markings of note. The blade is stamped with a crown/4, an indication that there was some relationship between the production of this volunteer piece and the Board of Ordnance.

A two digit numeral, 17 is engraved on the socket. If you look closely, you can see that the 1 and 7 are engraved in the same style - thin single strokes and multiple strokes for emphasis. Someone took a lot of care over their work back in the day.



In addition to the bayonet held in the Tower of London collection, a handful of further examples are retained in private collections, such as those illustrated in *The Bayonet, an Evolution and History* (R.D.C.Evans and Frederick J. Stephens, 1985), and *Collecting Bayonets* (J.A.Maddox, 2005). Stamped 'crown/4' on the blade, the Maddox bayonet is numbered "25" on the socket, indicating at least that number were manufactured.

**British & Commonwealth Bayonets*, Ian D. Skennerton & Robert Richardson, 1986, Ian D. Skennerton