



Arrowheads

Characteristics and different uses



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

1) Barbed Broadheads

All the heads illustrated were used in war but the barbed heads were also used for hunting game as their cutting edges would cause any strike to the body to bleed deeply. The heads were pinned to the shaft through a socket to prevent their loss. Arrowheads would have been just as expensive to make then as they are now. Arrowheads included in this group are as follows:-



Type 16 Barbed head

The photograph to the left shows the difference between the feathers of a flight arrow and an ordinary arrow. The ordinary arrow is used for target shooting. Its fletchings are 4 inches long and 1/2 an inch high (10.2 x 1.3 cm).



Type 15 Devizes Swallowtail Broad head

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

Bowmar, Ex. 1049

Bowmar v. Matthew Futtere

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Type 14 Large Curved Broad head

Largest of the heads illustrated, it was used for hunting large game such as deer or boar. It would have been used at short distances, where possible, to utilise its maximum cutting power. In war it was used to shoot at the horses and caused severe bleeding and immobility.



Type 13 Small Broad head

This small straight broad head was used for hunting small to medium size game and also in war against men and horses.



Straight Broad head

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



Curved Broad head

A type of head also used on large game such as boar or deer, but that would give a much deeper cut than the straight broad head.



Type 3 Barbed head

Extensively used in the early Medieval period both in 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 Broad head and Type 1 Anglo-Saxon Broad head

Both heads were used for war purposes as well as for hunting game and were popular throughout the Medieval period.

These heads have been used for hunting boar and elk in America. These two types are included in this group as they are both broad heads with long cutting edges even though they are not barbed.

II) Non Barbed heads



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

It was one of the most common war bodkins and would penetrate chain and plate armour at short as well as long range.



Type 9 Bodkin

A war head used in the Roman period as well as the Medieval period and designed to penetrate most types of body armour.



Type 7 Needle Bodkin

A popular warhead in the early Medieval period and designed to penetrate mail. It is a direct development of the Viking leaf shaped warheads used throughout that period. Tests carried out have shown 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 two inches long ones with 1/4" sockets, to 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 body armour worn at that time.



An Arrowhead known as the Type 6 Forked head does not fit neatly into either group. It was quite a common head of the Medieval period and open to much speculation as to its use. One of the theories is that it was used to cut rigging aboard ships. Another theory was that it's purpose was to slice and tear through sails. If either of these were so, none were found on the Mary Rose even though she put to sea to fight a naval battle. Others believe it was used to cut oncoming horses tendons. It would be interesting to hear if anyone has carried out any tests (leaving out the horses) and the results they obtained.

None of the above appear plausible, particularly rope-cutting and cutting horses' tendons would require great precision difficult to achieve in the heat of battle. The most plausible uses for this head would appear to be as follows:

- 1) It was used for shooting game birds because the two points would make it less likely to skid off the feathers.
- 2) In war it was used to shoot at the horses to inflict as much pain as possible so the animal, would unseat its rider. Unlike a broad head which would cut like a sharp knife without causing immediate pain, this head would cause immediate pain by tearing the flesh. By contrast ordinary broad heads have been noted by hunters who have shot deer to have caused so little apparent pain, the animal has continued to eat after being hit.



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

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(<http://www.hectorcoleironwork.com/>)

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