

A Lesson in Medieval Archery History

During the middle ages, massed archers, sometimes on both sides and sometimes against other types of foot soldiers, were used as a unified weapon. The tactics of driving the enemy into a restricted area by battle formations and then raining arrows down on them were refined to an art form. This tactical use of the Longbow was perhaps the first artillery. The skills, so learned, were then famously employed in the protracted 100 Years War between France and England. In these battles, small numbers of desperate English were forced to wage battle by overwhelming numbers of "Men at Arms" and French Nobles. The English slaughtered large numbers of French while taking few casualties themselves.

This is the period of history which gives the longbow its distinctive 'English Longbow' title. The bow soon dropped out of sight with the advent of the gun. However, as leisure time increased, the Victorian (well to do English) revived the Longbow as a sport and pastime in the many parks, country houses and clubs that existed in the mid-1800's.

These bows were of much lighter draw weight and construction than the War Bow of the Middle Ages. Also, the bows were drawn back to a much lesser degree. The War Bow was drawn to the ear, as a standard arrow (about a 'cloth yard' long - 36") was used with a bodkin armor piercing point. Victorians used 26-30"arrows and bows that weighed about 40-60 pounds at full draw, while the old War Bows often were 110-160 pounds pull and could shoot a 'heavy' arrow 360 yards or more.