

# Marcher Freeman



Issue 1, October 2008  
Prepared by Andy Sherriff.

Copyright Marcher Freeman 2008

**Guidance Notes:**  
for persons involved in re-enactment combat.

## Safety Aspects and Courtesy.

No head shots / blows ! – either by your Polearm or sidearms (sword , dagger , axe etc.).

Keep both hands on your pole / bill. Do not slide it through your hands = no 'cueing'.

Keep hands on the pole / bill in a manner that keeps both your palms facing the ground. This reduces the risk of the pole deflecting upwards during a hit.

Pull all stabs / lunges / blows. Never use full force – only enough for your adversary to recognise the hit. If they do not recognise a good hit – *tell them !!*

**You must wear a Padded Jack / Gambesson, Helm, Steel or padded leather gauntlets as the minimum.** This is not for visual effect – it is PPE for your protection. No bare skin on legs / arm / body. Possibly groin protection ( male ) or chest protection (female ).

If you receive a hit that would kill / injure / disable you, do your opponent the courtesy of recognising it !

It is common practice to buckle, fall to the ground, or just make eye contact & nod – then take a few paces back & wait a few seconds before re-entering the battle. There is nothing more frustrating than fighting with an immortal ☺ !!

When lunging at an opponent, it is safest to stab-place your point on them, then firmly push applying just enough pressure for them to register / feel the hit.

Never hit below the belt / groin area / unarmoured (no plate or padded armour) areas. Never towards the face or neck. Do not target legs / shins / feet / knees / elbows / hands / forearms / spine.

Take particular care when thrusting at plate armour (or even padded armour). Beware of the risk of your bill / spear point being deflected upwards & causing injury.

There is a very real risk of deflection if you are attacking a taller person or a person on higher ground than yourself.

If your opponent gets too 'heavy' with the combat, loudly tell them if possible, then retire & find someone safer and more courteous to spar with. If you have any issues with the safety of your opponent, back off & tell your Captain. They will sort it !!

If someone falls / receives an injury etc., shout MAN DOWN loudly & protect them from other combatants tripping or fighting near them.

Develop good spacial awareness. Know what is going on around you.

Please remember, that re-enactors are not insured for injuring each other. If an opponent is injured, they have the right to press criminal assault charges, should the injury be due to a deliberate action – such as is potential if tempers are lost.

If you are a guest of another group, please be at the forming up point before the designated time.

Check yourself – No Sharps on the Battlefield. Also, check your weapons for burrs and chips.

At the end of the battle, march off the field with the host group and return to their camp for dispersal.

Keep a check on the wellbeing of your fighting colleagues. If someone appears to be overheating – as is often the case – they may appreciate your helping them to remove Helm, Bevoir & armour etc. Or, getting them a drink. If someone looks unwell, do not leave them unattended.

Heatstroke and dehydration can be rapidly fatal if left unmanaged.

**Safety – Courtesy – Respect & Enjoyment.**

## Use of Pole Arms at Events

The following notes represent an introduction to the fighting practices adopted by most re-enactment groups doing Wars Of the Roses and 14th / 15th cent. Events. It is not definitive as each group has variations. However, the safety aspects are fairly universal.

### Definition of a Pole Arm.

Basically any weapon attached to a wooden pole / shaft, that is used two handed. Eg. Spears, Bills, Glaves, Poleaxes, Pitchforks etc. Medieval Polearms are generally 6 – 8 ft long.

### Commands.

Turn your faces to me.	Rank of soldiers should turn to face the Captain & await further commands.
Pick up your poles.	Pick up your pole arm & slope it onto your shoulder, holding the base of the shaft.
Turn to your pole.	This assumes the pole is on your right shoulder! Right turn!!
Knee bend.	Start marching.
Stand.	Stop marching.
Ground your poles.	Take pole from shoulder slope and rest the butt on the ground.
Rest on your poles / staves.	Stand at ease, resting on the pole.
Avante or Charge your poles / staves.	Lower your poles towards the enemy. Generally moving forward & stabbing / thrusting at the enemy.
Step.	Single steps forward, & generally stabbing / thrusting at the enemy.

Dress left or right.  
Close up.

Close with your colleague on either side, to reduce gaps.

Retread (not retreat!!)

Walk backwards to a location indicated by your Captain, but keeping good order & weapons pointing at enemy.

Disaray.

Order / permission to disperse at the end of the battle.

## Target Areas.

Primary target area for lunges / stabs with Pole Arms is the triangle formed between the collar bones to belt buckle. This is generally the most protected. BUT, look at what your opponent is wearing. If you cannot see armour, assume it is not there !

Secondary target areas are mostly your opponent's padded / armoured sides.

Only target your opponent's upper arms if they are well plate-armoured. Targeting plated thighs is not advised as a slip could go to ..... the groin or knee! Take care to avoid the central (spine) area if you are stabbing them in the back

An opponent in full plate will only acknowledge a hit if more intense force is applied. In real battle, a well placed bill point would penetrate plate armour!

It is acceptable to place your point between the gaps in upper body plate armour – provided they are wearing a padded jack underneath – on the principle of place then push. No broken ribs please!

It is generally acceptable to 'finish-off' a fallen opponent with careful spearing 😊



Common armour for a Billman is the Padded Jack / Gambesson.

Green area is the primary target.

Yellow areas are secondary targets.

Other areas are to be avoided due to risk of injury.

These are guidance notes only. Full responsibility for actions rests with the participating combatant re-enactors. It is advisable to ascertain the standard practices of any other group you are guesting with, or to battle as per any special guidance given in the event Captains' meeting.



## Fighting with Sword, Dagger, Axe, War Hammer, Mace, etc.

Always 'pull' your blows. Never use full force! Use the edge with care. Especially when hitting soft armour.

An effective safe hit – that they should register / respect on an opponent who is wearing soft armour can be achieved with the side of your sword.

If in doubt about your opponent's protection, do not hit them!

Beware of deflections towards no-hit areas, like the face and groin. Generally, the same no-hit areas described in the Polearm section apply.

Maintain spatial awareness. Know where people are around you, especially when drawing your weapon back to take a blow – even the sword quillion and pommel can injure an adjacent colleague.

Do not try to bring your opponent down from behind by bringing your blade / weapon shaft around their throat or Bevoir. Risk of significant injury !!

When using a Dagger, similar guidelines apply as for Polearms. Place the point & push until your opponent registers the hit. Its also worth telling them they are dead !! Armpits & gaps in any plate armour are favourite ☺

## Archery Safety.

Generally, bows of less than 60 lb draw weight are the norm, with 40-45 lb being standard. Wearing a Helm is mandatory. Padded jack & arms are highly recommended. It is advisable to wear a thin glove on the bow-hand, to protect from cuts made by poor fletchings.

When part of an archery block, obey the commands of the Archery Captain. Only loose arrows on command. The usual commands are:

Nock.	Nock your arrow onto the string.
Draw.	Draw the bow.
Loose!	Let go / loose (not fire !!!!) the arrow.

It weakens the bow if you hold it drawn for more than a few seconds. Arrows are usually supplied by the event organiser. If you use your own, they should be checked for safety. Some people have been known to place a rubber blunt over a sharp steel point !!! ☹ Always check any arrows supplied to you, for signs of damage etc.

Shoot in an arc. Flat shooting is only permitted upon willing well armoured opponents who are expecting the shot. Do not look up to observe incoming arrows !