

The Battle of **Barnet** and a Serendipity Moment

by Hilary Harrison



Nearing the end of a Battle of Barnet Project meeting in early 2018, Howard Simmons dropped a serendipitous bombshell. He had just returned from Canada where he had visited the National History Museum in Ottawa and he had interesting news.

A British Museum travelling exhibition, 'Medieval Europe: Power and Legacy' was showing and, coincidentally, the battle of Barnet had been chosen to illustrate the medieval warfare section. Amazingly, the stars of the show were a seal of the earl of Warwick and six arrowheads from the battle. The existence of these objects was a complete revelation to everyone around the table. They had not been recorded by the historians and archaeologists who had been researching and investigating the battle for decades. It had taken a chance visit by Howard to a country thousands of miles away to reveal their existence. The task was to see if they could now come back to Barnet.

Negotiations with the British Museum began. It transpired that the arrowheads had been given to the museum in 1851 by an unknown donor and had only been taken out of store for exhibition in Canada – the seal had been donated earlier. By now, the objects had been returned to the museum store, so Naomi Speakman, the Curator of Medieval Collections in the Department of Britain, Europe and Prehistory, was contacted, and she was very encouraging.

We booked to view the objects, becoming very excited about the possibility of a loan. After that, many emails and letters whizzed back and forth; we waited patiently while various committees met and made decisions. This was a rigorous process to satisfy the British Museum that Barnet Museum could display the objects securely and maintain the correct environment. Meanwhile, in anticipation, the museum purchased a new temperature and humidity-controlled cabinet together with a dehumidifier. Then, the pandemic hit and deadlines came and went. Even so, humidity levels were assiduously recorded. Light levels were checked. Insurance details were verified. All kinds of forms were completed. After nearly three years, the

email finally arrived. The British Museum had granted the long-term loan of the artefacts to Barnet Museum – their arrival date was set for Tuesday 29 June 2021.

Early that morning, Richard Wakeman, the British Museum's Assistant Collection Manager: Care and Access, arrived with a huge box. The curatorial team stood

around in awe as he decanted the objects and, with Helen Downes, Barnet Museum Advisor, looking on with equal concentration, carefully examined them to confirm and record their condition. The arrowheads appeared quite fragile, but close to it was possible to see the marks of the smith, as well as fragments of wood from the shafts still embedded in them. Amazing and very atmospheric! These arrowheads had been shot 550 years ago very near to where they were now on display – whether from the Lancastrian or the Yorkist side will never be known.

However, it doesn't take much imagination to conjure up a mind-picture of the barbarous action as the battle was waged that foggy morning 'in a field of battle near Barnet' (Shakespeare, *Henry VI, part 3*).

While the arrowheads represent the role of the 'common man', at the opposite end of the social hierarchy the seal of Richard Neville, earl of Warwick, is hugely significant. The machinations of this most over-mighty of warring nobles from the Wars of the Roses were arguably the chief reason for the battle – and his death the most significant outcome. Warwick's demise enabled Edward IV to 'mop-up' the remaining Lancastrian forces, led by Margaret of Anjou and the duke of Somerset, at the battle of Tewkesbury on 4 May 1471. The seal reflects the power of Warwick the Kingmaker. His influence underpinned by his incredible wealth, rivalled the kings he 'made' – Edward IV and Henry VI – and he wanted his power to be recognised. Something to ponder as we regarded this beautiful object. It might have been used to seal the famous letter from Warwick – with a postscript in his own hand – to Henry Vernon in April 1471, exhorting him to fight for the House of Lancaster in the forthcoming struggle against the Yorkists.

Richard Wakeman installed the seal and the arrowheads alongside our other precious objects from the battle – three golf ball-sized lead cannonballs damaged from impact, a purse-bar, a coin of King Edward IV, dated 1468, and a strap end, inscribed with the wheel of St Catherine. The display looked splendid and finally the cabinet was locked – not to be opened again unless a British Museum official was present. Barnet Museum is truly honoured to be entrusted with these unique objects from this significant battle.



The fifteenth-century depiction by Loyset Liédet of the Battle of Poitiers (1356) in Froissart's Chronicles – Please note the arrowheads.



The heraldic banner of Sir Roger Kynaston, painted by volunteers at Barnet Museum.



Richard Wakeman, of the British Museum, meticulously places the objects and closes the cabinet.



Notes about the arrowheads

The main reference work on arrowhead typology is the *London Museum Medieval Catalogue* (LMMC), based on medieval finds from London, by John Bryan Ward-Perkins, published in 1940. Subsequently, in 1996, Oliver Jessop published a research paper; *A new artefact typology for the study of Medieval arrowheads*. The paper suggests a new typology for arrowheads and takes advantage of excavations undertaken subsequent to 1940.

The new typology suggests four categories, Tanged, Multi-purpose, Military and Hunting, which are ascribed a likely function and date. For more details on the typology the paper by Jessop can be downloaded at www.doi.org/10.5284/1071852.

On each arrowhead, painted in neat white letters – the cataloguing system of 1851 – are the date and the order of receiving objects donated to the museum that day.

The Royal Armouries have made an informal report on four of the arrowheads, which are included in the captions and are a combination of the *London Museum Medieval Catalogue* typology and the new typology by Jessop.

The seal of the earl of Warwick

The British Museum catalogue revealed another dimension to the backstory of the brass seal. It was donated to the British Library in 1774, then to the British Museum in the 1830s. The donor was Mrs Victoria Kynaston. Her husband's ancestor was the Yorkist knight, Sir Roger Kynaston (1430–95) of Hordley, Shropshire. His heraldic banner was displayed in Barnet High Street as part of the commemoration of the 550th anniversary of the battle of Barnet. Apparently, it was he who took the seal from the body of the earl of Warwick as he lay dead in the closing stages of the battle. It remained in the possession of his family until 1774. Sir Roger went on from Barnet to fight at the battle of Tewkesbury on 4 May.

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Arrowhead (1851,0602.2) – A military arrowhead, despite being barbed, of a type used in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. It fits into Jessop's typology 'M' or 'Military' group in having narrow barbs. Suitable for warfare but it may have been used for hunting as well. This example is closely comparable to one from Chester (Poulton), which was found within the body cavity of a human skeleton.



Arrowhead (1851,0602.5) – This arrowhead also has close-set short barbs and is also an 'M' category (Jessop). Type 15s/16s (LMMC) vary considerably due to the different craftsmen fashioning them. This example is most closely comparable to the one from Westminster Abbey. As they needed less metal these smaller arrowheads were cheaper to produce in the huge quantities needed.



Arrowhead (1851,0602.3) – Although barbed, this is almost certainly a military arrowhead on the basis that it contains little metal. It belongs to the 'M' Military group – classed as a Type 16 (LMMC) despite having outward flaring barbs. Similar to the example from Chester, it can be compared to the arrows of English archers shown in the fifteenth-century painting of the Battle of Poitiers (1356) in Froissart's *Chronicles* from the Bibliotheque Nationale. It is sometimes known as a 'Poitier arrowhead'.



Arrowhead (1851,0602.1) – This more expensive arrowhead with very large broad barbs is categorised by Jessop as 'H3' or broadhead. It was more commonly used by foresters and huntsmen, but was sometimes used in warfare. The large cutting surface provided by the barbs made them ideally suited to hunting game such as deer; they caused significant tissue damage and blood loss whilst remaining in the body as the animal attempted to flee. It is chilling to imagine the effect on a human body.



The seal of the earl of Warwick 'the Kingmaker'.