

# The Fast and Dirty Broadsword Manual

By Master Henry Fox

## Abstract

A guide to the use of the broadsword. This is a simple examination intended for those who want to know the essence of the broadsword. One could call it a “bluffer’s guide” to the broadsword. This covers the essential parts of the broadsword alone regarding techniques, and some of the theory behind its use, however it is primarily focused on practical aspects. There is a certain amount of assumed knowledge present in this presentation regarding essential fencing theory and aspects of the sword and its use. The techniques and theory are based on the personal experience of the author supplemented by treatises describing the weapon’s use.

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## Introduction

*“all that Variety of Throws, Cuts and Guards which have been since invented and improv’d, and which now compose the Science of the Broad Sword, and are the subject of the following Discourse.”<sup>1</sup>*

What can be assumed, as most of the writers cited as masters wrote about the smallsword as well, is the broadsword, at least the techniques described were influenced by weapons that came previous. We can thus assume that techniques used when using the broadsword can be found in previous treatises. Further, we must assume that much of the nomenclature will be derived from the other weapons which the writers have written about.

If we examine the Italian treatises from the Medieval and Renaissance period, we will see a similar formation of techniques, “slightly less refined,” as those of this period would call it. However, for the purposes of these instructions we will allow this to inform us for this provides us with information we would otherwise not have available. So, while much of the technique here will be derived from 18<sup>th</sup>-century broadsword treatises the concepts are much the same as those found in period for the single sword.

Certain techniques and knowledge will be assumed during these discussions and instructions.

## Guards

*“There are five guards in the broad sword, viz. Medium, Inside, Outside, St. George, and Hanging. Of these in their order. The word medium means anything intervening, or middle; ... this guard will not defend a man; for if his adversary should make a blow ... he must quit this guard, and turn his wrist to ward off the blow, or slip, so that a man who stands to this guard, may only be said to be in a posture of defence; or, in other words, on his guard, waiting for the attack of his opponent, and draws his defence from this medium.”<sup>2</sup>*

There are five guards when using the broadsword, many more when addressing the Medieval or Renaissance sword, we will use the five for broadsword for the sake of brevity and for convenience. To understand these guards requires some knowledge of fencing and how it works. The medium guard, as indicated is a guard which sits in the middle of the others, so we will address it as a convenient start point, and because it is the most comfortable guard.

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<sup>1</sup> Page, T. *The Use of the Broad Sword*, London, M. Chase, 1746

<sup>2</sup> MacGregor, A. *MacGregor’s Lecture on the Art of Defence*, J. Neilson, 1791 in Rector, M. (ed) *Highland Broadsword: Five Manuals of Scottish Regimental Swordsmanship*, Highland Village, Chivalry Bookshelf, 2004, p.124

## Medium Guard

We are going to start with the Medium Guard because it is the most convenient, and the one which has a convenient place to rest. Comfort is an important factor, especially when waiting for the opponent to act, which is exactly what this guard is designed for.<sup>3</sup> This guard sits with the weapon toward the centre of the body, and the hand in line to cover the leg. The same as the Low Ward, I teach to fencers, minus the off-hand position. This guard sits between the Inside and Outside Guard. If the arm tires, the fencer can always rest their weapon with their pommel on their thigh, what Hutton refers to as a resting medium guard.<sup>4</sup> The dominant foot should be pointed toward the opponent and the knee should be bent.

### Drill 1: Form the Medium Guard

1. Place your dominant foot forward,
2. Place your sword hand over the dominant leg, with the point threatening the opponent,
3. The arm should be relaxed against the body, not completely bent, but also not straight,
4. The off-hand should be placed somewhere out of the way.
5. Resting: place the pommel of the weapon on your thigh, but only when the opponent is Out of Distance.

## Inside Guard

*“The Inside Guard is when you stand with each Foot on the Line of Defence and hold the Point of your Sword over against your Adversary’s Left Temple, and the Hilt in a Line with his Right Hip, and the Middle of your Sword cutting the Line of Defence at acute Angles, by which the internal Parts of the Limbs on the Right Side, and the fore Part of the Face and Body, with the whole Left Side, will be defended from being Cut.”<sup>5</sup>*

Page has a complex way of instructing the fencer to close the Inside Line with their weapon. Sinclair says to do this preferably while profiling their body at least a little behind it, while keeping their forward foot pointed at the opponent, with their knees bent.<sup>6</sup> The problem with such strict instructions is they do not account for body shape, the most important part here is that the body needs to be covered by the weapon, the Inside Line covered, the knees bent, and the point of the weapon threatening the opponent.

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<sup>3</sup> Sinclair, G. *Cudgel-Playing Modernized and Improved; Or, the Science of Defense, Exemplified in a Few Short and Easy Lessons, for the Practice of the Broad Sword or Single Stick, on Foot*, Transcribed by Michael Lovrich. <http://www.sirwilliamhope.org/>, p.8

<sup>4</sup> Hutton, A., *Cold Steel: A Practical Treatise on the Sabre*, London, William Clowes and Sons Ltd, 1889, p.13

<sup>5</sup> Page, T.

<sup>6</sup> Sinclair, G., p.7



*Figure 1: Hutton 1889 - The Medium Guard*

### Drill 2: Form the Inside Guard

1. Place your dominant foot forward, both knees bent a little,
2. Place your sword hand over the dominant leg,
3. The arm should be relaxed, only using enough energy to support the weapon,
4. Turn the hand so the knuckles are pointed to the Inside and push the weapon across so the Inside Line is closed, and the point is threatening the opponent.
5. The off-hand should be placed somewhere out of the way.

### Outside Guard

*“The Outside Guard is rais’d when you stand with your Body square, astride the Line of Defence with the Right and Left Foot at right Angles with it, holding the Point of your Sword over against your Adversary’s Right Temple, and sinking the Hilt in a Line with his Left Hip, by which the external Part of the Right Side of the Head, Neck, Arm, Body, Thigh and Leg, and secured from being Cut. In this Guard, the Position of the Right Hand differs from all other Guards, for it is to be bent at the Wrist with the back of the Hand and the Knuckles, (which are always in a Line with the Edge of the Sword) turn’d upwards and outwards, which defends the Sword Arm from the Shoulder to the Wrist without ever moving the Sword.”<sup>7</sup>*

The Outside Guard is designed to guard the Outside Line. Page gives a description of the position of the feet as this is often the first position taken by the fencer. Indeed, McBane instructs that the fencer should step into the position, from a position of rest with the sword across the left arm.<sup>8</sup> The sword is positioned over the forward leg, with the wrist turned so the edge of the sword is toward the Outside the point somewhat menacing the opponent, the knees are bent, as in the previous guards. When recovering to this guard, Sinclair advises that the fencer withdraw so the elbow is to the body, and the point is a little to the left.<sup>9</sup> The more common positions to recover to are the Hanging and St George Guards as they cover more of the fencer.

### Drill 3: Form the Outside Guard

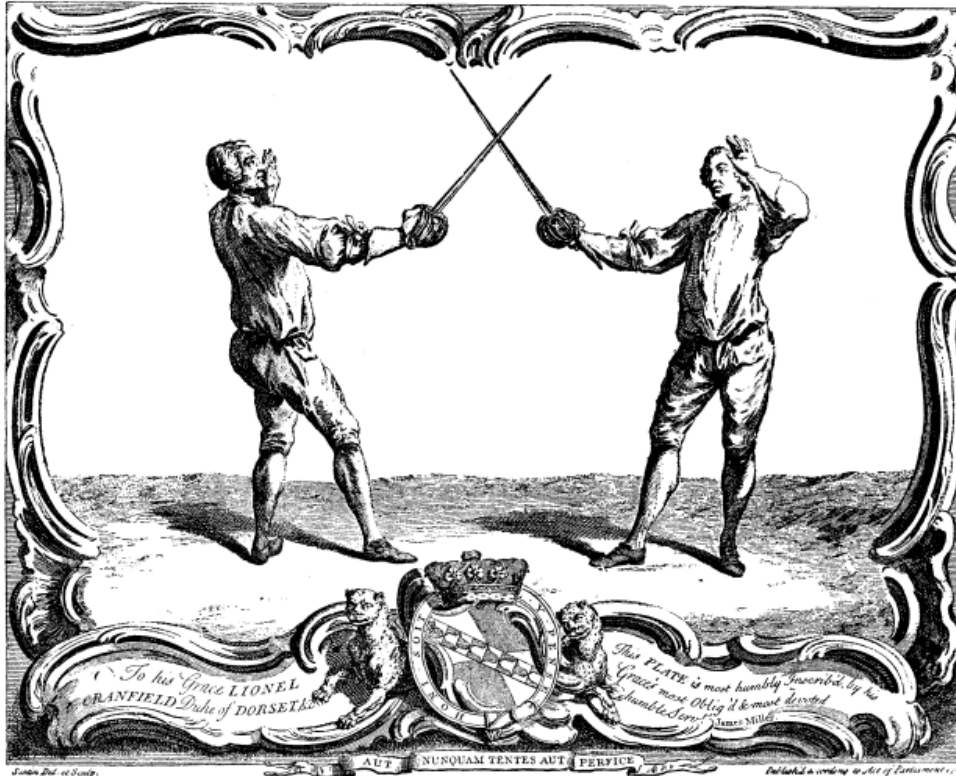
1. Place your dominant foot forward, both knees bent a little,
2. Place your sword hand over the dominant leg, possibly a little outside it,
3. The arm should be relaxed, only using enough energy to support the weapon,
4. Turn the hand, and wrist, so the knuckles are pointed to the Outside, so the Outside Line is closed, and the point is threatening the opponent.
5. The off-hand should be placed somewhere out of the way.

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<sup>7</sup> Page, T.

<sup>8</sup> McBane, D. *The Expert Sword-Man’s Companion* in Rector, M. (ed) *Highland Swordsmanship*, Union City, Chivalry Bookshelf, 2001, p.69

<sup>9</sup> Sinclair, G. p.7



THE INSIDE GUARD—AFTER JAMES MILLER, 1737.

Figure 2: Miller 1737 - Inside Guard

PLATE V.



THE OUTSIDE GUARD—AFTER JAMES MILLER, 1737.

Figure 3: Miller 1737 - Outside Guard

## Hanging Guard

*“the Hanging Guard, which is thus performed, with your Right Foot step a little backward and sideways, so as to make an acute Angle with the Line of Defence, and at the same Moment raising the Elbow of the Sword Arm, and present the Point of the Sword against your Adversary’s Breast, and covering your own Head, till you can see your Adversary’s Face clear under your own Fort: This Guard covers the Head, Shoulders, Face and Breast, and with the Point stops your Adversary from pressing too closely upon you, and keeps him at length when he is endeavouring to come up to half Sword, and is the dernier Resort when you have retreated, or are push’d into a Corner from whence you are too weak to advance, and not enough room to Traverse.”<sup>10</sup>*

The Hanging Guard is a most interesting guard and one which is often underestimated by some practitioners in our current days. However, it was considered a most useful guard by those who wrote about using the broadsword. It was one of the best Guards for defence. The position is almost vertical, with the dominant foot withdrawn, the sword lifted, so the sword hand is as high as the head, the pommel upward. The point of the weapon can still menace the opponent. This is the high position for the Hanging Guard, but it can be dropped where necessary, to defend lower parts.

From this position it can be turned to the St George Guard to defend the head, the wrist simply turned to defend blows to either Inside or Outside, while it gives more defence than offence,<sup>11</sup> it does not leave the fencer with no means of attack. This is the most common position a fencer is instructed to return to after an attack has been made for their defence.

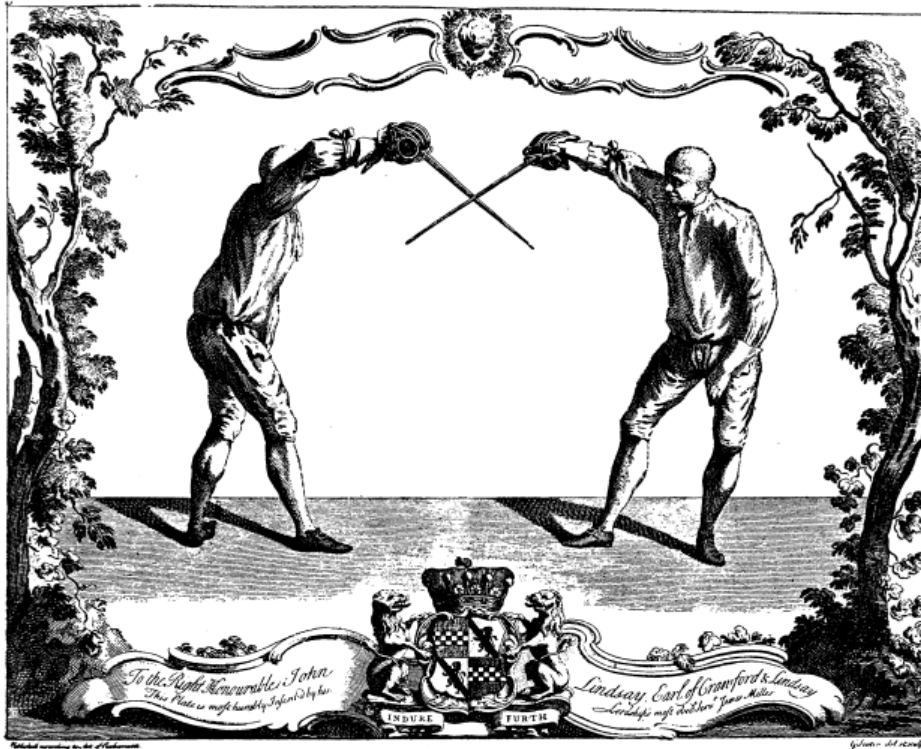
### Drill 4: Form the Hanging Guard

1. Place your dominant foot forward, both knees bent a little,
2. Withdraw dominant foot to rear foot.
3. Place your sword hand over the dominant leg,
4. The arm should be relaxed, only using enough energy to support the weapon,
5. Lift the sword so the pommel is upward and the point downward, up so the hand is as high as your head, the sword should slope downward across your body, but with the point toward the opponent,
6. Looking forward you should see past your forte,
7. The off-hand should be placed somewhere out of the way.

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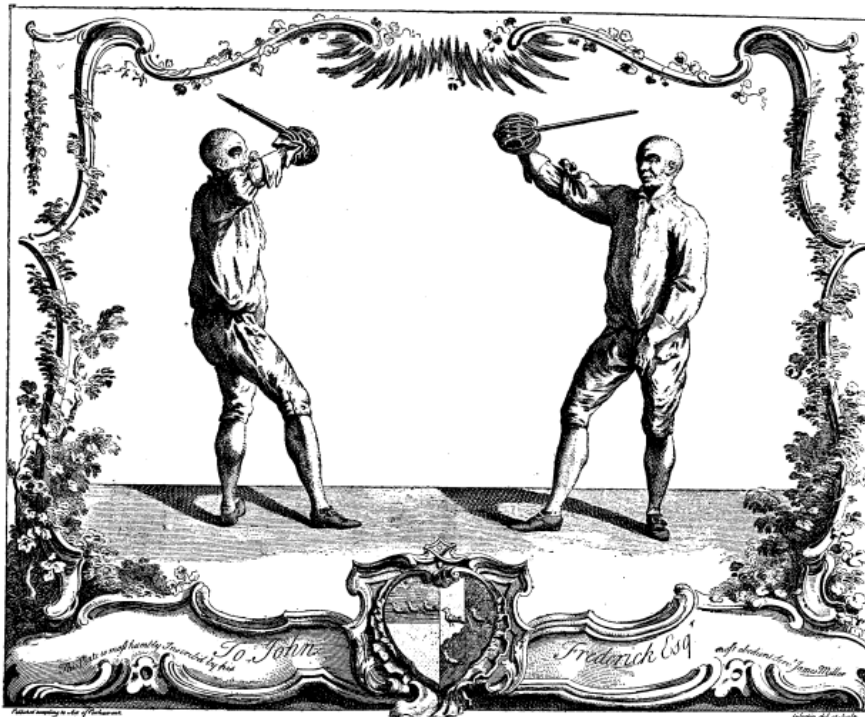
<sup>10</sup> Page, T.

<sup>11</sup> MacGregor, A., p.126



THE HANGING GUARD—AFTER JAMES MILLER, 1737.

Figure 4: Miller 1737 - Hanging Guard



THE ST. GEORGE'S GUARD—AFTER JAMES MILLER, 1737.

Figure 5: Miller 1737 - St George Guard



## St George Guard

*“St George’s Guard, which is perform’d by standing square across the Line, and holding the Sword a little rais’d above you own Head, parallel to your Shoulders, with the Edge turn’d upwards toward your Adversary; and is only used occasionally to stop a right down Blow aim’d at the Head or Shoulders.”<sup>12</sup>*

The St George Guard appears in several treatises, including some on the smallsword, as a defence against a downward blow aimed at the head or the shoulders. This is not a commonly used guard due to its position, however, it is very effective for what it is designed. The most important thing about this guard is the structure supporting it. Page indicates the individual stands square, with the sword parallel to the shoulders.<sup>13</sup> This reinforces the structure to enable the blow to be stopped. Some will place the hilt closer to the head,<sup>14</sup> some will slightly slope the weapon, or direct it to one side or the other.<sup>15</sup> The purpose of the guard remains the same.

### Drill 5. Form the St George Guard

1. Place your dominant foot forward, both knees bent a little,
2. Withdraw dominant foot to even with the rear foot.
3. Place your sword hand over the dominant leg,
4. The arm should be relaxed, only using enough energy to support the weapon,
5. Lift the sword so it is parallel with your shoulders, the blade upward. The strongest part of the forte should be over your head, you may slope it slightly over your left shoulder,
6. The off-hand should be placed somewhere out of the way.

Five guards have been described, along with how to form them in their basic forms. I recommend going through and examining each one and how they are formed. Examine the purpose of each one at a time before moving forward. Remember, these are the foundational positions from which all the other actions flow. The first action to consider once you have examined them is moving from one to the next.

## Changing Guard

There is a point of vulnerability when a person changes guard. So you must change guard judiciously to avoid being struck by the opponent, or at least being left open to such an attack. Page advises the fencer never to be out of a guard when you move; to change from one to another as you move from Inside to Outside on the advance; and change on the

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<sup>12</sup> Page, T.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> McBane, D., p.72

<sup>15</sup> Sinclair, G., p.8

retreat, stating that the Hanging Guard is the best to remain in, with the point at the opponent's chest.<sup>16</sup>

Fencers will know that you should never change guard unless it is either: by performing a blow, or when you are Out of Distance. The former forces the opponent to defend themselves rather than attacking the fencer, the latter means the opponent cannot the attacker due to the Distance between them.

McBane has instructions regarding the changing of Guards. First, when you change to the Inside Guard, keep it low, so the opponent cannot attack under the guard, and to disengage over the opponent's weapon rather than under it.<sup>17</sup> Firstly, a weapon which is held too high, is easy to make a cut under the position of their weapon. Secondly, a cut over, is easier to perform a cut from, it chambers a cut from that position, and it can be redirected easily, if required.

If the opponent should change their guard In Distance, McBane instructs the fencer, to slip their forefoot back, make a cut to the head and then return to a St George Guard.<sup>18</sup> This indicates what happens if you are not careful about changing your guard, and is a good, simple drill to begin with.

#### Drill 6: Changing Guard

##### *Medium Guard*

1. Fencer in Medium Guard, partner changes guard in Distance.
2. Fencer cuts to head, while slipping their fore foot back.
3. Fencer returns to St George Guard.

##### *Inside Guard*

1. Fencer in Inside Guard, partner changes guard in Distance.
2. Fencer cuts to head, while slipping their fore foot back.
3. Fencer returns to St George Guard.

##### *Outside Guard*

1. Fencer in Outside Guard, partner changes guard in Distance.
2. Fencer cuts to head, while slipping their fore foot back.
3. Fencer returns to St George Guard.

##### *Hanging Guard*

1. Fencer in Hanging Guard, partner changes guard in Distance.
2. Fencer cuts to head, while slipping their fore foot back.
3. Fencer returns to St George Guard.

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<sup>16</sup> Page, T.

<sup>17</sup> McBane, D., p.72

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p.69

### *St George Guard*

1. Fencer in St George Guard, partner changes guard in Distance.
2. Fencer cuts to head, while slipping their fore foot back.
3. Fencer returns to St George Guard.

This is a basic action which will become familiar as the instructions progress, the primary action is to launch the attack and quickly return to guard before the opponent's response can be returned. In these drills there are no returns, but it is better to be practiced for a return than not, because if the opponent parries, there will be a return.

## Footwork

Footwork is a subject some people will find rather dry and monotonous; others will find most interesting. In any true system, footwork is a key element, because it controls Distance. If a fencer can control Distance, they can control the bout. When using the broadsword in the method described there are a few footwork motions of importance.

The advance, a footwork motion to close with the opponent. The retreat, a footwork motion to withdraw from the opponent. The traverse, a sideways motion, somewhat on an angle to gain advantage.<sup>19</sup> Then there is the lunge, which is the action of footwork and sword combined, which will be discussed last due to the blurry line it crosses. In all these motions, the Distance the fencer is away from the opponent is most important. Any time the fencer is within Distance, be that with a simple extension of the arm, or a lunge, the fencer must remain guarded in some fashion.

## Advance and Retreat

Should the fencer wish to advance on the opponent it is advised that they ensure they are covered and threaten the opponent.<sup>20</sup> The threatening to keep their weapon occupied, the covering to receive any blow they might perform. The action of the advance being simple, the forward leg taking a step followed by the rear leg, this way keeping the defended side of the body forward.

The retreat simply reverses the process, the rear foot moves, followed by the front foot. While the sword is not strictly part of this action it is good practice to get used to using it while moving. This way it will become natural to move the sword when you move.

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<sup>19</sup> Page, T.

<sup>20</sup> McBane, D., p.74

## Drill 7: Advance and Retreat

### *Advance*

1. Threaten the opponent with the point at their face to the inside.
2. Step forward with the front foot the length of the foot, followed by the rear foot the same distance.
3. Keep watching the opponent's sword to keep covered during this progression.

### *Retreat*

1. Threaten the opponent, then pull the sword back to either a Hanging or St George Guard.
2. Step back with the back foot the length of the foot, followed by the rear foot the same distance.
3. Keep watching the opponent's sword to keep covered during this progression.

Should you wish to accelerate your closing or withdrawing for any reason, this can be performed using the passing step, which is like normal walking. In this case one foot passes the other. These are best used when you want to close on the opponent quickly or withdraw from the opponent quickly. Just like the advance and retreat do not forget to remain covered.

## Traverse

Aside from the advance and retreat the key piece of footwork used with the broadsword when used single is the traverse. This action is a footwork motion made sideways in its literal form, but at a slight angle to take advantage of the position. This is intended to change position and take advantage of where the opponent expects the fencer to be, then using the advantage of angular movement the fencer is in a better position. This is an excellent step for breaking a pattern. This action is typically made to the Outside, leading with the leading foot.

## Drill 8: Traverse to Outside

1. Step to the side with the leading foot, and slightly forward.
2. Follow with the rear foot to take its usual position.
3. Cover yourself during the action.

McBane indicates that a short thrust should be made toward the opponent before the traverse is made.<sup>21</sup> This is intended to put them on the defensive to allow time for the traverse to be made in safety. The travers to the Inside can be performed, some will argue that it should also be performed off the lead foot; others will say it should be performed off the rear foot. The former stating that it being a forward motion and having the sword leading; the others stating that the other foot results in the feet not crossing. The fencer should experiment for comfort as having this as an option will open more opportunities.

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.72

## Slip

The slip is where the fencer withdraws their front foot back to the rear foot. This is especially effective for defeating blows to the leg, however, the skilled combatant who learns to slip effectively can also use the same technique to slip their body.<sup>22</sup> Further, the same technique can be applied to any part of the body in the void.

### Drill 9: Slip

1. Opponent throws a blow at the front leg.
2. Fencer pulls the front foot back to the rear foot.
3. Opponent throws a blow at the body,
4. Fencer pulls the front foot back to the rear foot, possibly past,
5. Fencer also caves their body.

Only the defensive applications of the slip have been described here, as we are only discussing the footwork application of the slip currently. Later there will be demonstrations how the slip is used as part of counter-offensive actions. This is most often directed at blows performed at the same time as the slip is made. But remember, when you are Out of Distance, this is the *only* time you are safe from the opponent.

## Lunge

The slip blurs the line between footwork and defensive action. Then again, the retreat step, or traverse, could also be seen as a defensive action if performed at the correct moment, so in effect they could all be seen as defensive actions and footwork. However, the lunge is an offensive action. When most people think of the lunge, they think of the extension of the thrust, however the same is used with the extension of the cut, and in much the same manner, if a little shorter.

## The Feet

Like the lunge associated with the point, the power from the lunge is derived from the explosive separation of the legs, the extension of the rear leg propelling the body forward. It is not the result of a big step. This second method is “gravity lunging” and results in slower lunges that are more difficult to recover from, and you certainly need to recover from a lunge. We will start with the legs first.

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<sup>22</sup> Sinclair, G., p.11

### Drill 10: Lunge I: The Feet

1. Push against the ground with your rear foot. Remember, the lunge goes across not up.
2. Begin to extend your rear leg.
3. Just as you feel yourself about to topple over forwards, extend your front foot, stepping like a normal advance, just a little bit further, about half the length of your foot.
4. In your completed position:
  - a. your rear foot should be flat to the ground,
  - b. your rear leg should be fully extended,
  - c. your body should be upright.

This is the lower part of the lunge and only the beginning of it. The advantage of this method is that of you get to step 3, and your opponent moves, or begins an action to counter, you can use the same force to propel yourself elsewhere, change your action; you don't have to lunge. Most people would think this is sufficient and finish their study of the lunge here, but it is not sufficient. Are you going to fence the rest of your bout from this position? There is an important element to be added, one almost more important than the lunge, the recovery.

### The Recovery

The recovery returns the fencer to their guard position. Once again, because we have not included the weapon yet, mostly because this is described in other parts, it is just a little timing we need to deal with later, we will examine the recovery from the perspective of the legs. This is because the recovery is all in the legs.

### Drill 11: Lunge II: The Recovery

1. Complete a lunge.
2. To recover backward, begin extending your front leg. If you have over-extended this will be difficult. If you are leaning over your leg, it will also be difficult.
3. Begin contracting your rear leg. These two legs are what perform the recovery, not throwing the head back into position. Your eyes must stay focused on your opponent.
4. Withdraw your front foot back to its original position.
5. To recover forward, the process is the same, except it is the back foot that moves forward, rather than the front foot being withdrawn.

The best recovery will result in the point of the weapon not wavering but remaining pointed at the opponent. This is because it will mean the fencer can act straight after the recovery is completed and the opponent will remain threatened the entire time the recovery is being performed.

## The Hands

Regardless, whether it is a thrust or a cut, the timing of the hand in the lunge is vital. Too early and the opponent will see the attack, and it will lose the impetus from the lunge; too late and the fencer is undefended when they attack, they present themselves open. Hence the hands are addressed separate from the feet, rather than attempting to put it all together at once.

### Drill 12: Lunge III: The Hands

1. Push against the ground with your rear foot. Remember, the lunge goes across not up.
2. Begin to extend your rear leg.
3. Just as you feel yourself about to topple over forwards, this is where you begin to extend your hand.
4. Then, extend your front foot, stepping like a normal advance, just a little bit further, about half the length of your foot.
5. In your completed position:
  - a. your rear foot should be flat to the ground,
  - b. your rear leg should be fully extended,
  - c. your body should be upright,
  - d. and your point should strike at the same time as your front foot.

Again, the advantage of this method is that if your opponent changes action, or motion, by separating into these steps, at step 3, you can change to a defensive action, or move elsewhere, or simply stop the action. This action has been described as a thrust, which is a viable action for the broadsword, however, the same can be used with the cut with the same timing. This will take some practise. The reason this action has been separated is because it is one of the key actions and is that blurry line between footwork and hand action and is a good place to start these actions.

## Actions

Under the description of “actions” there are many things to consider. There are obvious things such as the cut, parry, and return or riposte, as some might term it. These actions tend to fall into sequences advised in the appropriate treatises in which they are described. One must not forget the footwork which has been described, nor the proper action of the lunge either. Further, we must consider the proper performance of these actions.

*“Many advise always to keep a straight arm when engaged at back sword, which is a very bad advice indeed. ... for, if a person always keeps his arm straight, it will soon become nervous, even although he had not a sword in his hand. Therefore I advise broad sword players to keep their sword arm bent, and perfectly easy, by which means they will be enabled to fence double*

*the time they would do with it straight. But let them take care to straight their arm when a blow is aimed at them; this is the time to do it,"*<sup>23</sup>

There is a time for the arm to be relaxed and left bent, and there is a time for the arm to be straight. This is a matter of determining the correct action. MacGregor indicates if the arm is kept straight all the time, it will become fatigued, and the fencer will not be able to perform their actions properly, however, it should be straight when a parry is performed to give it strength. This is a matter of biomechanics as the arm is better suited to defence with the straight arm, and offence and other actions with it looser, as the weapon will flow much easier.

Continuing with the general advice for actions, it is also advised the fencer opposes the opponent with the same Guard.<sup>24</sup> This close the Line the opponent is on, and when at close Distance will engage the opponent's weapon giving them something they must move around preventing a direct attack. The object here is to ensure the opponent's weapon is always opposed in some form, then to seek an opening and strike while guarded.<sup>25</sup>

While the primary offensive action of the broadsword is the cut, the thrust should not be forgotten, as it is equally effective. Should there be an opportunity for a thrust the fencer should take this option where they are covered. The best way to ensure this is to turn the edge of your weapon to the opponent's. This will ensure you have the mechanical advantage.<sup>26</sup>

## Parry

When examining the defence against the opponent's attack, we have already discussed using Distance, using footwork. The more active defence is to use the sword, using a parry with the sword against the opponent's sword. Of importance, each of these parries may be made with opposition, or as a beat parry. The former contacting and remaining engaged with the opponent, the latter, striking the opponent's weapon away.

Hutton indicates certain parries for each cut performed against the opponent, and a corresponding pair of parries the fencer can use to defend against them using modern sport fencing nomenclature.<sup>27</sup> For those uninitiated in these terms, parries to the appropriate Lines will suit, however, I will also indicate options where parries which form Guard which are indicated previously are formed.

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<sup>23</sup> MacGregor, A., p.149

<sup>24</sup> Sinclair, G., p.8

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p.12

<sup>26</sup> Hutton, A., p.32

<sup>27</sup> Hutton, A., pp.34 – 35



### Drill 13: Parry

1. Opponent cuts to High Inside Line,
2. Fencer parries to High Inside line, or parries with Hanging.
3. Opponent cuts to High Outside Line,
4. Fencer parries to High Outside Line.
5. Opponent cuts to Low Inside Line,
6. Fencer parries to Low Inside Line, or parries with low Hanging.
7. Opponent cuts to Low Outside Line,
8. Fencer parries to Low Outside Line.
9. Opponent cuts to low High Inside Line,
10. Fencer parries to low High Inside Line, or parries with low Hanging.
11. Opponent cuts to low High Outside Line,
12. Fencer parries to low High Outside Line
13. Opponent cuts vertical to head,
14. Fencer parries St George or High Inside or Outside if to one side.
15. Opponent cuts vertical upward,
16. Fencer parries Low Inside line.

The most important thing is that the opponent's cut is stopped, the Line is covered by the parry. The utility of the other Guards which have been described begin to show their use in this drill as they appear as forms of parry. This shows the difference between the wards of previous ages as compared to the Guards of the later ages.

### Return

Once a defence has been made, there should be a return, a riposte, some sort of counter-attack. The fencer should not stand idle and simply defend themselves as this will not end the encounter, they must respond at some point. However, simply lashing out at the opponent after a defence has been made is not the best idea. The return must be swift, the first option should be that it is only made with the arm, and no shifting of the body, and then supported by a lunge if required.<sup>28</sup> The fencer should only move as much as they need to at any point. Anything more is energy they are using in excess which could be used for other purposes. The fencer must remember they do not want to be too close to their opponent at the end, so they cannot withdraw if their strike is not successful, and even if it is, returning to a safe position should be of great concern to the fencer. Various returns are described, but first it is essential to know how this should be performed.

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p.74

## Cuts

The cut requires technique, it is not merely smashing the edge of the weapon into the target. There is technique required. The weapon being used is a sword, not a club. There is a cutting target, which needs to be 14 inches in diameter, which is taken from Roworth's treatise of 1798, reproduced by Hutton, which describes his six cuts.<sup>29</sup> This is recommended as a practise target for getting used to cuts for the broadsword and is presented in Appendix 1 for your convenience.

In practice the cuts were more about the targets available to the fencer at the time, however, to get an idea of the cuts being used, it is useful to get an idea of how these cuts were applied. One thing of note is that there are two vertical cuts, two horizontal cuts, and three diagonal cuts noted by Hutton in his description of the cuts used.

He describes: a diagonal downward to the head; diagonal upward to outside of knee; horizontal to belly; vertical to head; vertical upward cut to groin (not for school play); diagonal downward to leg; horizontal to cheek.<sup>30</sup> No matter how you stretch it that diagram will not cover all of these cuts, hence the target is for practise and control, whereas the cuts were applied where they were needed. One must not literally apply cutting diagrams as being only those positions on the target.

With the point-orientated weapon, the idea is to keep the point on the opponent as much as possible. With a cutting weapon the approach needs to be different, thus the application must be different. The cut over, or disengage over the point, with a point-orientated weapon is a difficult prospect, but with a cutting weapon, this is not the case, "in general all cuts are performed by disengagements over the point,"<sup>31</sup> because it presents the edge, more to the point the leading edge, toward the opponent in this action.

When the cut is made, it is vital that the individual position themselves correctly, especially regarding the opponent. You should always put your weapon between yourself and the opponent's weapon, thus cover yourself with your hilt and at least position your weapon in opposition to the opponent.<sup>32</sup>

### Drill 14: The Cut

1. Fencer stands on guard; opponent also stands on guard.
2. Fencer finds an advantage of position.
3. Fencer performs cut to an open target, positioning their weapon to cover the opponent's weapon, and themselves with the hilt of their weapon.
4. Fencer returns to their on guard position, covering themselves.

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p.23

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.30

<sup>31</sup> MacGregor, A., p.130

<sup>32</sup> Hutton, A., p.32

The description in this drill is quite general, giving no description of the guards taken, nor the cut performed. Further, it does not indicate the opening found. It is intentionally made this way because it is a drill intended to present the principles found in the proper cut, with the fencer covered during their attack.

The attack made could be a lunge as indicated in the drills for the lunge and recovery. The idea of the cut on the lunge for this weapon is quite common. This allows the body to give additional impetus to the cut during the attack, and extends the attack, as the lunge is intended. Some enthusiastic practitioners will attempt to perform more than one attack during their lunge. However, Hutton advises against this, advising the fencer to return to guard between each cut.<sup>33</sup> The fencer could be left exposed, especially if the opponent slips the blow.

## Slip

The slip was addressed previously in the discussion of footwork. This was to present the foundational elements of this technique, as found in Drill 9. However, it was indicated there was a counter-offensive potential for this action, where the opponent's weapon was voided, and the opponent left open. With the appropriate techniques discussed, we can now address this option.

Sinclair begins with a simple drill for the slip with one throwing blows, and the other slipping them. He then begins to increase the complexity, allowing for a return by the fencer. In this first one, the fencer slips the blow, then drops the point of their weapon from Hanging Guard, to give the opponent a thrust to the Inside Line.<sup>34</sup>

### Drill 15: Slip I: Sinclair I

1. Opponent throws a blow at the front leg.
2. Fencer pulls the front foot back to the rear foot, moving to Hanging Guard.
3. Fencer drops their point, and thrusts to the Inside of the opponent, returning the front foot.

The Hanging Guard performed with the slip positions the fencer in the perfect position to perform the returning thrust. Returning the foot to its original position gives the attack impetus, with the fencer's body behind the thrust. This is a simple reply. Page also uses the slip in quite a few of his actions and from different Guards. From the Inside Guard, when the opponent throws to the Inside, the fencer slips and then throws a blow to the Outside.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p.30

<sup>34</sup> Sinclair, G., p.11

<sup>35</sup> Page, T.

### Drill 16: Slip II: Page I

1. Fencer in Inside Guard,
2. Opponent cuts to the Inside,
3. Fencer slips, allowing the weapon to go past,
4. Fencer then cuts to the now open Outside Line.

Because there was no resistance where the opponent would have expected something, the opponent's weapon would have likely gone past the fencer, and turned the opponent, exposing their Outside Line, allowing the attack from the fencer. Sometimes it is better not to parry the opponent's weapon but let it past as this can leave a better opening. This the principle of the slip. One more from Sinclair's sequence which is useful, the same attack to the leg and its withdrawal, but this time the cut is to the exposed arm.<sup>36</sup>

### Drill 17: Slip III: Sinclair II

1. Opponent throws a blow at the front leg.
2. Fencer pulls the front foot back to the rear foot, moving to Hanging Guard.
3. Fencer cuts to the exposed arm of the opponent, while returning their front foot.

The problem with making an attack is that the arm is exposed. This is the reason the opponent's weapon needs to be covered when the attack is made. It is easy for the opponent to strike our arm rather than attacking our body because it is closer and removes the threat. The actions which have been presented thus far are relatively simple: the opponent throws a blow; the fencer slips back and counters. Remember you can also slip to the side.

### Drill 18: Slip IV: Page II

1. Fencer in Outside Guard,
2. Opponent cuts to the Outside,
3. Fencer slips to the left, allowing the weapon to go past,
4. Fencer then cuts to the Outside Line to the head.<sup>37</sup>

Here, the fencer not only slips the opponent's blow, but also slips to the side, adding to the Distance. The counter to the head avoids the opponent's weapon because a blow straight down the Outside Line to the body would be impeded by the opponent's weapon. One could say that this is a slip combined with a traverse, and we begin to see some of the complexity which begins to grow.

The last sequence for the slip will be predicated on an opponent's action. This means it needs to happen, or the opponent needs to be forced into this position. The opponent recovers into the Outside Guard, the fencer throws a blow to the Inside Line giving an opening, the opponent reacts throwing a blow, the fencer slips to the Inside, throws to the Outside Line,

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<sup>36</sup> Sinclair, G., p.11

<sup>37</sup> Page, T.

and retreats under a Hanging Guard.<sup>38</sup> The most useful thing about this sequence is that it is *almost* complete, being that it includes the fencers retiring into the Hanging Guard at the end.

To finish our discussion, we will examine a play from each of four of our Guards, Inside, Outside, Hanging, and St George. The Medium Guard is not presented because it is a Guard of preparation, it is more akin to one of the older wards of the older systems, a position from which an attack or defence is launched, rather than a position which closes Lines, like the other four.

So, a single demonstration of actions will be presented from each Guard.

## From the Inside Guard

The Inside Guard should be common to many people and quite comfortable, likely the most comfortable aside from the Medium Guard due to the lack of strain it puts on the body. Page describes a sequence where a blow is made to the Inside, from the Medium, thus establishing the Inside Guard. From there a parry to the Outside, returning a blow to the Inside, and then parrying to the Outside.<sup>39</sup> This could be seen as a simple drill sequence.

### Drill 19: From the Inside Guard

1. Fencer in Medium Guard.
2. Fencer cuts to Inside
3. Opponent parries to Inside, cuts to the Outside,
4. Fencer parries to Outside, cuts to Inside,
5. Opponent parries to Inside, cuts to Outside
6. Fencer parries to Outside.

## From the Outside Guard

Page increases the complexity in the next sequence, using more of the Guards and showing them in action against different attacks. It shows them being used as parries, thus Guards in their truest sense. We can learn a lot from these sorts of sequences, such as where the weapon moves to and from the easiest.

### Drill 20: From the Outside Guard

1. Fencer starts in Outside Guard
2. Opponent throws to Inside Line
3. Fencer parries to Hanging Guard, fencer throws to Inside,
4. Opponent parries to Inside, throws to Outside,
5. Fencer parries to outside, recovers to Hanging Guard.

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

6. Fencer moves to St George Guard, throws to head.<sup>40</sup>

The recovery to hanging is most useful as this Guard can cover a lot of the fencer if they are positioned correctly. If required, it can even cover the High Outside Line, in an emergency, it is one of the safest Guards.

## From the Hanging Guard

The Hanging Guard is one that has been argued about regarding its correct position for some time. The best thing for the practitioner to remember is that this guard is meant to cover the body and head from horizontal attacks primarily, though can also effectively be used against thrusts as Sir William Hope proposed in his *A New, Short and Easy Method of Fencing* of 1707. In this instance it is McBane who proposes using the Hanging Guard.

### Drill 21: From the Hanging Guard

1. Fencer in Hanging Guard,
2. Opponent cuts to the head,
3. Fencer raises their hand to catch the blow below their hilt.
4. Opponent cuts to ribs,
5. Fencer turns point away, returns cut, covering head.<sup>41</sup>

McBane's method is effective, if simple in its approach. His method was not the polite school play we find in some manuals. It was intended to put the opponent down in a short a time as possible. The same sort of effect can be seen in his approach to using the St George Guard.

## From the St George Guard

According to McBane, the St George Guard is the safest Guard.<sup>42</sup> Then again, with his English heritage, this should be little surprise. His sequence from this position is quite involved and it will be discussed in two sections as it presents two plays.

### Drill 22: From the St George Guard I

1. Fencer starts in the St George Guard,
2. Opponent cuts to the head,
3. Fencer parries, and returns the cut,
4. Fencer returns to St George, then strikes the face.

The opponent initiates the encounter with a cut to the head, which the fencer parries. The fencer replies with a cut, returning to the St George Guard, and then strikes at the opponent's face. In this sequence the fencer returns to his guard after each attack, striking against different targets.

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> McBane, D., p.72

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

### Drill 23: From the St George Guard II

1. Fencer in St George Guard,
2. Fencer strikes to head, face, or body,
3. If the opponent stops the attack on the Inside, the fencer changes to the Outside,
4. If the opponent stops an attack to one part, strike another.

This is a purely offensive drill demonstrating the options available from the St George Guard and how to deal with an opponent who prevents the strikes from landing. The advice is to change the Line and change the target if the opponent defends. Clearly, based on the previous drill, the fencer should return to their Guard after each attack.

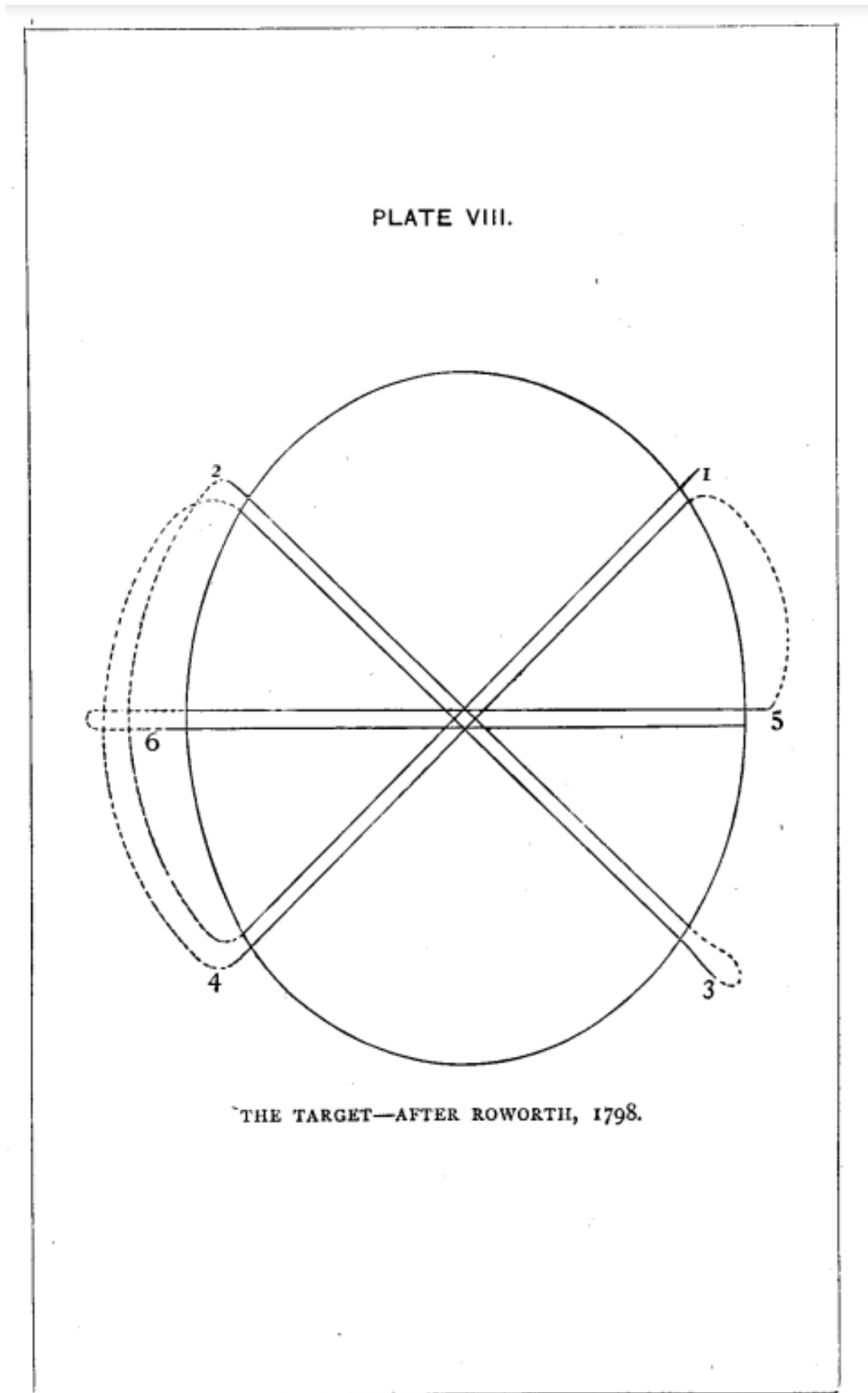
## Conclusion

We have barely scratched the surface of using the broadsword. What has been presented are the elements of using a single-handed cutting sword without any companion, as described in certain selected treatises from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Of great importance is that the techniques found within these treatises is that they were based upon those weapons and treatises which came before them. We can find evidence of similar techniques in previous treatises, these treatises merely refined them, codifying their guards, actions, and practices.

There has been a certain amount of assumed knowledge expected of the reader, given that there has been no explanation of elementary fencing theory presented anywhere in these discussions. It is assumed the individual who reads this has some understanding of the weapon they are using and some understanding of how it is used. The discussions and drills are intended to educate and refine some of the practices currently used, rather than for a beginner.

It is recommended that the reader investigate some of the materials found in the Bibliography and Suggested Reading as there is much more information available. There has been very little discussion of period treatises and there are some which discuss this weapon in a civilian setting which could be of use. If these discussions have inspired the reader to look for more about this weapon, and others like it than the author has achieved their objective.

# Appendix 1: The Target – After Roworth, 1798





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