

Brief introduction to The British Pattern 1885 sword by Mark Cloke

The British Pattern 1885 sword was designed during the period when the British army was continuing to argue on the merits of the 'cut' versus the 'thrust' of British cavalry blades, therefore (as is the case with most Victorian cavalry blades) it was a compromise and not good for either.

The hilt design was first introduced for the 1864 pattern, this was primarily a new hilt mated with the existing 1853 pattern blade (35 ½ inches long 1 ¼ inches wide). No official trials took place for this hilt and there were a number of complaints about the edges of the guard rubbing against the uniform and causing it to fray (this was corrected on the 1880 pattern).



This sword continued to be the official pattern until about 1880 when a new design was sought, what followed was five years and numerous patterns. One complaint of the 1853 pattern blade was its weight. The following patterns looked to lighten the blade and in some cases shorten it. The result was to create blades that, when tested regularly, bent or broke.

Eventually a new pattern was agreed in 1884 and the new 1885 pattern was accepted. The new blade was 34 ½ inches long and 1 1/8 inches wide. It has a single fuller ending 8 ¼ inches from the point with the last 10 inches double edged.



New tests were introduced for the 1885 pattern involving hitting the edge and back of the blade by a machine to an equivalent of the 'hardest blow a man could strike against the trunk of an oak tree' the blade was also to be bent round a pattern to a degree where the distance from point to guard was shortened by 5 inches.

In 1888 these swords were tested in action by the British Cavalry against the Mahdists round Suakin, complaints were subsequently received with dramatic reports of the blade breaking when 'making a downward cut upon a enemy's head'. Investigations were subsequently made by testing blades already issued and the results showed the blade still as being to weak. Subsequently the 1890 blade was introduced. The 1890 took advantage to changes in manufacturing techniques and also different testing methods, it was also about 3 ozs heavier with small changes to the design of the fullers. The 1885 pattern hilt was maintained on the 1890 blade.

Reference - "*Swords of the British Army*" by *Brian Robson*