

# The Quarter-staff

after Zach Wylde, 1711



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Note: the following is based on a transcript of Zachary Wylde's 1711 'English Master of Defence' hosted at [www.sirwilliamhope.org](http://www.sirwilliamhope.org). Some spelling has been modernised and minor edits made for readability. Any errors are entirely my own - William Carew, November 2012.

Now according to order, I shall proceed to quarter-staff, the common length is seven foot, I divide it into three parts thus, The part which you take first hold on, I call the handle or butt end of the staff, the middle is the half-part of the staff, the remaining completes the length of the staff. It is a true British weapon, of great antiquity, much practised and admired in former days; to give it its due praise, it is a most noble weapon, and very useful in several respects, it is in the nature of a double weapon, by reason when you exercise it, you make use of both hands: I wonder that it is not more in vogue in this nation, considering its excellency, for a man that rightly understands it, may bid defiance, and laugh at any other weapon, for it has a double advantage in many kinds of all others; the long-pike, half-pike, or pitch-fork, may be termed fools next to it, no, they can't in the least come in competition with it.

As to the grounds and rudiments thereof, fully depends both of broad and small-sword, upon the broad-sword, more in reference to the blows, chops, strikes, slips and traverses; it only borrows from the small-sword the lunge, thrusts and darts. No weapon is learnt or understood so soon as this, because there's so little variety in it, and the method so easy and plain.

Therefore, I do not design to make a long preamble to a little matter, but explain the guards, which are the inside, outside, medium, and pendant. You advance or raise the guards on this manner, stand upon a full or entire body, some two foot spare with your legs, and lay your staff at length upon the ground; then take hold of the butt end with your left hand, advance it middle height, and take hold forward with your right hand, about a foot distance from your left; so bring the middle of your staff by your left ear, round the back of your head, stepping at the same time with your right foot, an equal distance from the left, so you come to an inside guard; the butt end of your staff then will be against your left side, both your arms being stiffly extended, the other part of your staff will cross your opponent's eyes: lying on this manner, if your opponent makes a blow or stroke to your left ear or inside, you are then prepared with a true guard.

In order to come an outside, you must return your staff by your right ear, likewise your foot into the place from whence it came, and you may come to an outside guard; the butt end of your staff then will be against your right side, and the other part will cross your opponent's eyes the contrary way: lying on this manner, if your opponent strikes at your right ear, you are then upon a secure guard.

From there you may come to a medium, by dropping the point of your staff, and bringing it by your left ear, and with a step with your right foot, the same distance you did before, then place it between your opponent's eyes, this is the medium guard: now if your opponent charge you with a blow or stroke at your head, cross his staff and it will make a perfect guard.

From the medium you may come to the pendant, which I call the high guard thus, slip your right hand almost to the left, and return your staff round the back of your head, then your point will slope or hang dipping; but observe that you see your opponent's head twelve inch under the butt end of your staff, or you can in no measure be safe: I do not approve of this guard, though it was in much esteem formerly, but it is not valued; the reason is, because the point of your staff being dipped, your defence is weak: the in or outside guard at length, which I call the low guard, is much the stronger, and far the better.

Firstly, admit that you come to exercise with any man, lie upon a low outside guard, then if your opponent strikes at your open on the inside, cross his staff, which makes an absolute guard, and with all the life and quickness imaginable, return your blow to his inside: if you lie upon an outside, when he strikes at your outside, then guard and answer quick to the inside.

2<sup>nd</sup>. Come to the outside order again, and if your opponent strikes at your inside open, guard and answer with a dart; that is, make a full and home thrust with a lunge, like cart in ters at small-sword, to his outside.

3<sup>rd</sup>. Lie again upon the inside order, and when your opponent strikes to your outside, guard and answer with a dart to his outside: I have been a professor of the noble science above this thirty years, and I never yet saw the artist that could defend himself from either of these darts; but no man can perform them, unless he be a great proficient in the art of small-sword, because they fully depend upon the true planting of a thrust.

4<sup>th</sup>. Lie again upon the outside, and when your opponent strikes to the inside, guard and return your blow over his point, to the outside of his right leg.

5<sup>th</sup>. If you lie upon the inside, and your opponent strikes at the outside guard, then fall your blow to the inside of his right leg; there is no ways to escape being hit by either of these answers, but to withdraw your leg out of distance.

6<sup>th</sup>. A slip at staff is performed thus, lie upon an outside, and when your opponent strikes at you, instead of guarding, slip him; that is, withdraw the butt end of the staff, as far as your right ear, and fall back with your body; then pitch your stroke in with a lunge, directly upon a medium to his head, and you may easily knock any man down, so far as the ground will let him fall; but be sure you lapse no time in the performance of the slip, you may slip thus from either inside or medium.

7<sup>th</sup>. engage your opponent's staff strongly with yours on the inside about the middle, press his staff down as low as his waist, then slide your blow along the staff to his face: you may perform the like, by engaging your opponent's staff on the outside, and perform as before directed.

8<sup>th</sup>. Lie upon a medium, and engage the middle of his staff on the inside, advance one step, disengage, slide or slip your hands together along the staff, and make your blow on his arm, or right side of the head, or put in the dart.

9<sup>th</sup>. engage again on the inside of your opponent's staff, then slip your staff as aforesaid, and strike full upon the outside of his staff, and so you may with great ease throw it out of his hand, then make your blow with all expedition imaginable: you may easily strike a staff out of any man's hand, when you lie out at length, without slipping your hands.

10<sup>th</sup>. You come up to half-staff, on this manner, lie upon a medium, engage your opponent's staff about the middle, with the end of yours, upon either in or outside, advance one step, and slip your hands along the staff, then both ends of your staff will be upon a level, your hands two foot distance from each other, your arms extended, holding your staff half a foot higher than your head, being upon a full body, I call this the level guard, but I do not like it: indeed, if your opponent makes a downright pitch at you, you are safe; but if he should strike sliding along the staff, it is ten to one but he may disoblige your knuckles; but to prevent that, guard him with one end of your staff, that is, according as he makes his blow, you must prepare your guard.

It's a very nice thing to play half-staff well, because it depends so much upon the quick slipping of your hands on the staff; your cunning in traversing (whereby you may gain several advantages), and the right putting in of the dart, which I can't express in words, but it is soon done in action.

Take note, that the feints at staff are like those at broad-sword, made over the point of the staff; you can make but a single feint at staff, it will not allow doubling on it, by reason you consume so much time in performance. A feint at staff when you are out of length with a step, is a grand cheat; you may make it in different manner, that is, pretend to strike on the inside, and conclude on the outside, or pretend to make a blow on the out, and finish on the inside: you may feint after the same manner at half-staff, as you do at length, without using step.

A false dart at staff, is a most excellent thing, and very dangerous to the opponent; it is performed after the same way as feint at small-sword, with a lunge, either to your in, or outside; and if your chance or designedly hit your opponent in the face, with a dart or thrust, it is much odds you'll eclipse on of his eyes: you now find that quarter-staff hath its dependence both of broad-sword and small-sword, as I have explained before, etc.