

**The Wapenshaw**  
**Sword Blades on Scottish Baskethilts 1600-1745**  
*by Hank Griffith*

To quote C. E. Whitelaw in his book *Scottish Arms Makers*, "The blade, as in nearly all Scottish swords, is foreign." These were imported mainly from Germany and fitted to hilts by Scottish armorers. These blades were mostly from the Solingen and Passau (Germany) blade makers, although a few have Spanish inscriptions on them.

Solingen makers of the 16th century were Heinrick Kohl, whose mark was the cross and orb as well as the wolf of Passau; Johannes Wundas, his mark was 4 crowned king's heads, and Herman Keisser, who would sign his name and have the Solingen wolf, or the wolf of Passau, as it was known.

Solingen makers of the 17th century were Iohannes Hoppe, Theill Keveler, and Peter Henckles; the latter's mark was stag antlers. All these, and not a few more, also used the inscription Andrea Ferara (no matter how spelt) on their blades as a selling point to their Scottish customers, to whom it was like a spell or talisman to have on a blade. A little background on this Andrea Ferara: We know that he and his brother Giovan Donato Ferara had their workshop in Belluno in Venetia in the second half of the 16th century, where their blades were renowned for their superb temper. We know from Mr. Wendelin Boheim, the learned custodian of the Imperial Collection of Armour in Vienna, that Andrea was born in 1530 and died sometime after 1583, when he and his brother are recorded in Cigogna's *Trattato Militare*, published in 1583, where he specially mentions the brothers as celebrated blade makers.

To get a better understanding of why the Highland Scot would buy a blade marked so, we should consider them: The Highlander of olden times was in general a simple, unspoiled soul caught in the middle of growing external pressures and, like all throw-backs, he clung to the codes and attitudes of the past. His sword, much in the manner of his Norse antecedents, was given an almost living identity. And, just as in the Sagas,

great mystical, incantatory importance was laid to the designs with which the hilt was pierced and especially to the way the blade was signed or inscribed.

We can almost believe there was honest-to-goodness magic about on that day in the last half of the 16th century when a hypothetical and now unknown Scottish Highlander wielded the first Andrea Ferara bladed sword with such devastating effect that soon and for a great time to come, similarly marked blades were *de rigeur* in those regions. These blades of the 17th century, and the end of the 16th, either made by Ferara himself or the Solingen-made blades, were broadswords, that is to say double-edged for their full length. They were often fullered at the forte with two short fullers, and then would have two or three fullers sometimes running their entire length. Fullers are sometimes called blood grooves, but their sole purpose is to lighten a blade without affecting its strength.

Some of these early broadswords had been two-handed swords and were cut down to make single-handed basket hilts in the 17th century. By the second quarter of the 18th century the broadsword was declining in use and the backsword, which is a thick-backed single-edged blade, was coming into more common use, and unfortunately many of the double- and triple-fullered blades of the 17th century were altered into backswords by grinding down one edge and bringing the point back about one-third of the way from the end.

These early broadsword blades as well as the converted backswords were still very much sought after in the 19th century by officers going on foreign campaign, which would be remounted to regimental hilts.

References:

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