

ARCHERY IN MEDIEVAL CHADDESSEN

The longbow was an essential piece of equipment for men of all classes in the later Middle Ages, whether they were professional soldiers, yeomen, or labourers. In ordinary hands the bow offered a relatively cheap, but effective, means of self-protection in what were comparatively lawless times, and it is therefore little wonder that archery often features in medieval legislation. For example, in the reign of King Edward I, the Statute of Winchester (1285) directed that because of an increased number of robberies, murders and thefts, men between the ages of 15 and 60 should equip themselves with specified weapons in order to keep the peace. An assessment was to be made on a sliding scale according to the wealth of each individual, and those men with between two and five pounds' worth of land were to furnish themselves with 'a Sword, a Bow and Arrows, and a Knife'. The English longbow typically measured between 5 ft 6 ins and 7 ft long and had a draw-weight (the horizontal force required to tension the string prior to releasing the arrow) of some 140–170 lbs, making it a truly formidable weapon which was used to great effect in battles such as those against the Scots at Dupplin Moor (1332) and Halidon Hill (1333), and more famously against the French at Crécy (1346).

Rather surprisingly it is still possible to see marks created by archers of years gone by here in Chaddesden. The main west doorway of St. Mary's Church was built in the Perpendicular style of English architecture and dates from around the middle of the fifteenth century. The external face of the doorway is flanked by splayed decorative mouldings, and on close examination it will be seen that those on the north side bear a number of roughly parallel vertical grooves gouged out of the stonework. The average length of these grooves is in the region of 20 or so inches, with their centres at approximately 50 inches above the present exterior ground level. Largely unnoticed by most people today, you might be forgiven for thinking they were perhaps done in order to key an exterior coat of rendering to the stonework at some point in history, but a glance at the identical mouldings on the south side of the door shows no similar grooves ... so what purpose did they serve? The explanation is a simple one, for they were created over many years by generations of Chaddesden men using the stonework as a handy means of sharpening their arrowheads before heading off to practice their skill as required by law.



St. Mary's Church, Chaddesden: The left-hand picture shows the location of the arrow-sharpening grooves; the right-hand picture provides more detail.

It is important to realise that in the early medieval period there was no such thing as a standing army but, as mentioned above, all men were expected to answer the king's call to defend the country either by serving in the militia themselves or by providing substitutes [Note 1]. Consequently it was of crucial importance that men were at the very least competent in the use of a bow, hence the need for regular practice.

However, by June 1363 King Edward III was concerned that the rising popularity of other sports had caused archery to be neglected throughout his kingdom. He therefore issued orders to the sheriffs of all counties to the effect they were to cause proclamation to be made 'that every able bodied man on feast days when he has leisure shall in his sports use bows and arrows, pellets or bolts, and shall learn and practise the art of shooting'; simultaneously the king also banned (under threat of imprisonment) other sports such as handball, football, cock fighting, etc., as 'vain games of no value'.

The Statute of Cambridge issued by King Richard II in 1388 (and repeated by King Henry IV in 1410) directed that servants and labourers were not to carry swords and daggers, but to have bows and arrows instead 'and use the same the Sundays and Holydays'. The archery practice specified by these various acts would have been carried out at the village butts. Each village had an area of land to be used by its archers with one or more butts – usually earth mounds with small pieces of cloth pinned to them by way of a target. A fourteenth-century picture of archers shooting at the butts appears in the British Library's *Luttrell Psalter* (see [Luttrell Psalter – Archers at the butts](#)), which was made for Sir Geoffrey Luttrell of Irnham, Lincolnshire, sometime between 1325–1340 [Note 2].

The arrow-sharpening grooves at Chaddesden must date from after c.1450, for this is when the tower and main west doorway were added to the church and, shortly afterwards, in 1477, King Edward IV once again banned various games and asserted that 'every Person strong and able of Body should use his Bow, because that the Defence of this Land was much by Archers'. The siting of the main church door at Chaddesden is probably responsible for the fact that the grooves only occur in the stonework on the north side of the door. We have already seen that archery practice was to be held during whatever leisure time was available in the medieval period, in other words on Sundays and feast days (of which there were quite a number) when everyone in the parish would have been expected to attend a church service. Presumably the men took their longbows and arrows to church with them so they could all depart to the village butts as soon as the service had finished. When leaving the church here at Chaddesden they would naturally have turned to the right (north), perhaps pausing for a few moments to sharpen any blunt arrowheads on the convenient stonework and then going on their way [Note 3].

Chaddesden is by no means the only village to have these grooves in its stonework, but since most churches typically have their main doors on the south side, this is where they are usually to be found. Here the main door at the west end of the church was a comparatively late feature, all traces of an earlier original south door (together with any earlier arrow-sharpening grooves) being removed either when the tower was constructed, or during the Victorian restoration of the church in 1857–1859 when the whole south wall was rebuilt.

The third year of the reign of King Henry VIII (1511) saw the passing of 'An Act concerning shooting in Longe Bowes'. The king noted that good archers had defended the realm in the past, but was concerned that archery skills were now diminishing. He therefore ordered that every man under the age of 60 not lame, decrepit or maimed should practice shooting with the longbow and 'also to have a bowe and arrowes redy contynually in his house to use hymself'. The act continued (and here I have modernised the text somewhat): 'And also that Butts be made in every City Town and Place according to the law of ancient time used; And that the inhabitants and dwellers in every of them be compelled to make and continue such butts and to exercise themselves with long Bows in shooting at the same and elsewhere on Holidays and other times convenient.'

Because most archery practice took place on Sundays or feast days after services in church, the village butts would have been conveniently sited fairly near to the church, and fortunately their approximate location at Chaddesden can be ascertained thanks to various references to 'Butts Yard' from the mid-eighteenth to twentieth centuries. Butts Yard was a narrow drive some 50 yards long opposite the Village School, now the Community Centre on Chaddesden Lane. From Victorian times right up until the middle of the twentieth century, the yard was bounded to the south by part of Hall Farm and to the north by the schoolmaster's house and a couple of ancient cottages [Note 4].

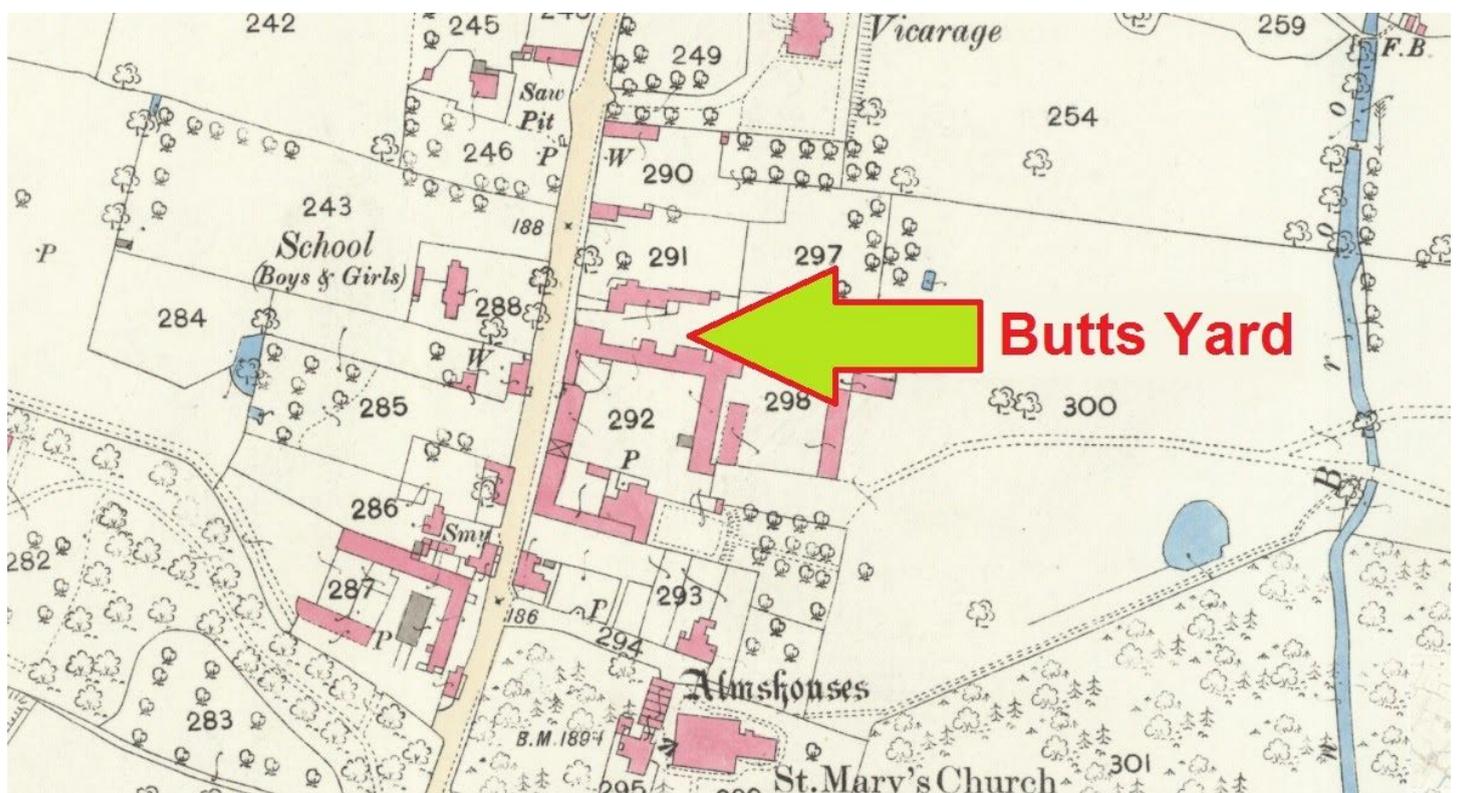
In this photograph of c.1905, Butts Yard can just be seen over to the right behind a gate. The house, which was then the residence of the schoolmaster, Mr. Joseph Robinson (pictured) has now been replaced by 136 and 138 Chaddesden Lane, but the short length of wall upon which the two girls were sitting still survives to the present day in front of number 136.



Chaddesden Lane c.1905. Butts Yard is over on the right-hand side of the picture and ran down the side of the Schoolmaster's House. A somewhat blurry figure can be seen walking up the yard.

In 1541 King Henry repeated his earlier legislation regarding the butts. The butts were to be made everywhere before the next Feast of St. Michael (29 September), the inhabitants being compelled to maintain and keep them and forfeiting 20s for each three-month period they were not in place; once again all men were to exercise themselves with longbows in shooting at the butts and elsewhere on holy days and other convenient times. Most interestingly, the act also stated that men over the age of 24 should shoot at a minimum distance of 220 yards ... presumably this was because it would take a man many years of practice to achieve the necessary strength to shoot this distance and it would be unrealistic to expect the same standard from a younger person.

The next illustration is an extract from the 1883 Ordnance Survey 25-inch map showing Butts Yard. Of course, the yard only provided the access-way to the butts in medieval times; what is unclear is exactly which way the archers then shot, i.e. north-south or east-west. It may simply be coincidence, but the east-west distance as measured from the end of the yard down to Chaddesden Brook was approximately 220 yards ... the minimum required range for a trained man.



1883 Ordnance Survey map showing the location of Butts Yard. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland (<https://maps.nls.uk/index.html>)

There is unfortunately a lack of information regarding Chaddesden inhabitants who served in any of the medieval campaigns as an archer, however, a database called *The Soldier in Later Medieval England*, which was created jointly by Henley Business School and the University of Southampton in 2009 and designed to investigate the emergence of professional soldiery between 1369 and 1453, actually lists three individuals called Chaddesden (various spellings), two of them archers [Note 5]. Whilst the three entries from the database listed below do not give details about where the soldiers lived, it is clear from their surnames that they or their families must once have had some connection with our village. The information given by the website provides their date of service and campaign, together with the names of their captains and commanders, i.e.

John Chadesden (June 1373), Archer – France, Captain: Ralph, Lord Basset of Drayton (c.1335–1390), Commander: John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster & Aquitaine (dd.1399)

Richard Chaddesden (1415), Archer – France, Captain: Humphrey of Lancaster, Duke of Gloucester (1390 - 1447); Commander Henry V, King of England (1386 - 1422) [Note 6].

Thomas Chaddesdeen (1417), Man-at-Arms – France, Captain: Sir Hugh Luttrell; Commander: Henry V, King of England (1386 - 1422).

As far as I can recall, none of the early Chaddesden wills mentions a longbow and arrows and just one refers to soldiering. George Ward's will was dated 2 June 1544 and in the preamble he states that he is whole in body and perfect of remembrance and prepared 'to ye kyngs warres in France' [Note 7]. George seems to have been one of around 36,000 men sent from England to Calais in that year to fight the French, the bulk of them armed with pikes or longbows. What happened to our Chaddesden soldier is not known, but just over half a year later he was dead, for an inventory of his goods was prepared on 26 January 1545, revealing he possessed items worth just under £20, but from which debts of £4 7s 4d had to be deducted. His will was finally proved on 4 May 1545, leaving us none the wiser as to whether he died fighting the French as an archer or infantryman, or passed away here at Chaddesden.

