

FIGHT CLUB

ONE IN A LONG LINE OF BATTLE RE-ENACTMENT ENTHUSIASTS, TANYA JACKSON ATTENDS THE LATEST FAMILY REUNION



TEMPTED? REMEMBER...

✓ DO

- ✓ come with an open mind and a "can-do" attitude. Life in the 17th-century was pretty hands-on.
- ✓ a bit of research on costume before making or compiling your own. No one wore square-cut tunics and green tights.
- ✓ be prepared to drink and eat 17th-century fare. It is not uncommon for someone to pass round a jug of mead or blackberry wine.
- ✓ watch your language. Contrary to popular belief, "wench" is not affectionate speak for a busty barmaid – it actually meant a woman of ill repute.

✗ DON'T

- ✗ worry if you join your local regiment and find that it's not quite what you were looking for. There are more than 70 regiments across the UK and you'll be meeting them at events, so if you click with another group there's always a chance you can join them.
- ✗ be afraid of "cliques" – the Knot are a friendly bunch and always looking for new members.
- ✗ expect Glastonbury. There shouldn't be any drunk students camping next to your tent, tripping over your guy ropes or being sick outside the entrance. Just grown men in costume.
- ✗ take the mickey. A sense of humour is one thing, but the Knot are passionate about re-enactment and won't take kindly to sarcastic jibes.

The year is 1648. King Charles is imprisoned at Carrisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight and Parliament has taken over the country.

Pockets of Royalist resistance remain – rebels who spring up to defend their king in the wake of England's New Model Army, led by General Thomas Fairfax and Oliver Cromwell.

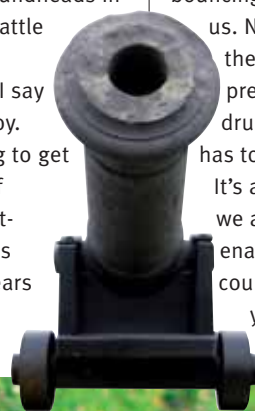
Standing at the foot of a large meadow by the Royal Gunpowder Mills near Waltham Abbey, we can hear drums in the trees ahead. Dum, dum, du-du-dum. Then

comes a blood-curdling cry, followed by a roar of voices. It seems a group of Charles's followers, the Cavaliers, have met with the opposing Roundheads in the woods. And the battle is heading this way.

"It's alright, Jake," I say to my friend's little boy. "No one's really going to get killed." With a look of disappointment, eight-year-old Jake takes his hands from over his ears and squints at the trees, looking for any

signs of red or blue woollen coats. "Have a care!" comes a shout to our left, and the sound of a real cannon bursts through the air, bouncing off the buildings behind us. No one has their fingers in their ears though – the air pressure would pop your ear drums. Or so the announcer has told us.

It's actually June 2008, and we are watching an enactment of a battle that could have taken place 360 years ago. The event is being staged by the



coming down to London to inspect the new baby, coming coming down to London to inspe

Sealed Knot, a historical re-enactment charity, now in its 40th year. Beyond the safety rope, the Royalists and Parliamentarians spill into the field and charge to an area near the crowd to battle it out ferociously with pikes, swords and muskets.

As the field fills with gunpowder smoke and fallen footmen, 17th-century women scurry around the field bringing water to the soldiers

and attending to the "wounded".

Coming from a Sealed Knot heritage (my uncle and aunt, cousins and brothers are all members), this doesn't seem so bizarre to me, but Jake isn't quite sure what to make of it all. Particularly as there are other children wandering around in breeches and bonnets, as if all this is perfectly normal.

"We don't really believe we're in the 17th century," says Michael Molcher, pikeman, rope-maker and press officer for Leeds City Council. "We take what we do

seriously, but at the same time, we're having fun."

This certainly seems to be the case, as the two armies jeer gleefully at each other before launching another attack.

Behind us is the Living History village, where the "civilians" sit, peacefully cooking, weaving and spinning, leaving the rough stuff to the barracks. These devoted re-enactors sleep in authentic-style tents, cook 17th-century food using campfires and cast iron pots, and demonstrate to the

● AUTHENTIC WEDDINGS AND BAPTISMS MAKE THAT SPECIAL DAY A LITTLE BIT DIFFERENT, AND FUNERALS, ALTHOUGH RARER, ARE A WAY OF PAYING TRIBUTE TO SOMEONE'S PASSION IN LIFE ●

public what life was really like in the time of the Civil Wars.

"People sometimes think that they were almost peasants, in that they had no luxuries and life was hard," Michael grins. "But people coped, and made things pleasant for themselves."

Indeed, all the food has been made from scratch using local, seasonal ingredients. Common "Knot" fare includes homemade bread, jam and cakes, sausages, stews of rabbit or chicken, and even home-churned butter, made by Deborah in Sir Henry's Bards regiment.

Of course,



coming-down-to London-to-inspect-the new-baby-coming coming-down-to London-to-inspe

the Living History area only makes up a small percentage of the overall scene. Most of the other 200 members are safely camped out of sight of the public and within easy reach of the beer tent and toilets. They are allowed

more modern luxuries, such as cars, trailers, sleeping bags and Campingaz.

The organisation was formed in 1968 and took its name from a secret Royalist organisation from the time of Cromwell's protectorate. The idea was to promote historical research and

to boost public awareness of the history of the English Civil Wars.

As well as staging battles across the UK almost every weekend throughout the year, the Knot also travels to schools and stately homes to educate children and adults about the clothing, food and lifestyle of the 17th century. Often working closely with local and national charities, it is estimated that, through their activities, the society have raised more than £1m in the past 20 years for good causes, although their main agenda is simply to preserve Britain's heritage.

The Sealed Knot prides itself on being "entry-level re-enactment", allowing members the freedom to attend as few or as many events as they have time for. However,

many develop a taste for the social side and find their unusual hobby becoming a way of life.

"We have baptisms and funerals, plus about two weddings a year," Michael informs me. "Authentic weddings and baptisms make that special day a little bit different, and funerals, although rarer, are a way of paying tribute to someone's passion in life."

Social worker Kate met and married her husband through the Sealed Knot, with a 17th-century style wedding. The eight attending men's outfits were all hand-made by the groom's mum and even the non-Knot guests were able to borrow costume.

"The venue loved it," Kate smiles. "They said it made such

a nice change to the usual suits and dresses and silver service."

The Sealed Knot is largely made up of families, so it's no wonder that SK children often grow up displaying good social skills.

"Kids tend to have a lot of emotional maturity because they're not isolated like a lot of children are today," explains Michael. "It's a ready-made community – everybody knows each other. Then there's the educational aspect as well. Kids grow up knowing what real fire is, rather than just how to turn the central heating on."

Jake certainly likes the idea of this. The Sealed Knot may have won over a new recruit. ●

For further information go to thesealedknot.co.uk

GET KNOTTED

August 9-10
PICTON CASTLE
Pembrokeshire
Mini Multi Period (variety of enactments from other groups)

August 23-24
BELVOIR CASTLE
Leicestershire
Major (1000 participants)

September 20-21
CHIRK CASTLE
North Wales
Mini Muster

WARS OF THE WORLD...

- **Napoleonic:** napoleonicassociation.org
- **Viking:** vikingsonline.org.uk
- **Romans and Britons:** vicus.org.uk