

City of London swords

Two men in black cloaks walking side by side on a red carpet. One wears a fur hat and carries a sword in a red and gold scabbard upright. The other wears a judge's wig and has a large, gold mace over his left shoulder.

The State Sword of the [City of London](#), carried with the Mace from the [Royal Courts of Justice](#) during the [Lord Mayor's Show](#) in 2011.

The **City of London swords** are five swords that the [City of London](#) has for special occasions. They are the Mourning Sword (or Black Sword), the Pearl Sword, the State Sword (or Sunday Sword), the Old Bailey Sword and the Mansion House Justice Room Sword. When the Lord Mayor goes outside the City of London sometimes he or she takes the Travelling Sword of State, which is different from the State Sword. They are kept at [Mansion House](#), where the [Lord Mayor of London](#) lives.

Mourning Sword

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The **Mourning Sword** is used for [funerals](#) and related events. It has also been known as the Black Sword and the Lenten Sword. The facts behind the sword's history are unclear; however, speculations have been made. *The Telegraph* says some people think it is from the 16th century and that it might have been found in the [River Thames](#). More than one sword has been used as the Mourning Sword.^[1]

[Samuel Pepys](#) wrote about this sword in his diary on September 1663. He is writing about talking to [Anthony Bateman](#), who was the Lord Mayor:

After dinner into a withdrawing room; and there we talked, among other things, of the Lord Mayor's sword. They tell me this sword, they believe, is at least a hundred or two hundred years old; and another that he hath, which is called the Black Sword, which the Lord Mayor wears when he mournes, but properly is their Lenten sword to wear upon Good Friday and other [Lent](#) days, is older than that.

— [Diary of Samuel Pepys, September 1663\[2\]](#).

Writing about that part of Pepys' diary, [Henry Benjamin Wheatley](#) says that [William St John Hope](#) says places like the City of London have had simple, black swords for this reason for a long time. He also says that the [blade](#) of the sword is old but the rest of it is newer.^{[3][4]}

In *Ceremonial Swords of Britain: State and Civic Swords* (2017), Edward Barrett says that the Mourning Sword they have now is from 1615 or 1623.

It has a blade 3 ft 2³/₈ in (0.975 m) long and 1⁷/₈ in (4.8 cm) wide, and a 12 in (30 cm) hilt.^[5]

Lord Mayor [Roger Gifford](#) carried the Mourning Sword at the [funeral of Margaret Thatcher](#) in 2013. He led [the Queen](#) and [Prince Philip](#) in and out of [St Paul's Cathedral](#). The last time it was used at a funeral before that was in 1965 for [Winston Churchill](#).^[1] It is also used on [Good Friday](#), [feast days](#) and the [anniversary](#) of the [Great Fire of London](#).^[5]

Pearl Sword

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[Black and white woodcut image of a man in a cloak on a horse, by a horse-drawn carriage containing a man \(George III\) and woman, among a crowd](#)

[King George III](#) receiving the Civic (Pearl) Sword from the Lord Mayor of London on his way to [St. Paul's Cathedral](#)^[6]

The **Pearl Sword** is supposed to have been given to the City of London Corporation by [Elizabeth I of England](#) in 1571^[a] when the [Royal Exchange](#) was opened. The Pearl Sword derives its name from the roughly 2,500 [pearls](#) on the scabbard.^[7] Wheatley says that Hope says it might not be from 1571, but from 1554 or 1555.^[3]

Its blade is 3 ft (0.91 m) long and 1³/₄ in (4.4 cm) wide, and it has a 10³/₄ in (27 cm) hilt. It weighs 4 lb 6³/₄ oz (2.01 kg) without the scabbard. The first 20¹/₂ in (52 cm) of the blade have been made blue and scratched with pictures of fruit, arrows, a ship and other things. Its scabbard is from at least as long ago as 1808.^[8]

When the Queen comes to the City [in State](#), she is met at the border between the City and Westminster, where [Temple Bar](#) used to be, by the [Lord Mayor of London](#). He offers her the sword to touch.^{[7][9][b][10]} Before 1641, the king or queen would take the sword and keep it while they were in the City. In 1641 [Charles I](#) gave it back to the Lord Mayor instead of keeping it for himself during his travels, and from that point forward this became the new tradition. This ceremony traces its roots to 1215, when the Mayor (now the Lord Mayor) began to be [elected](#).^[11]

When [George III](#) became king on 22 September 1761, they had to use the Pearl Sword because someone forgot to bring the royal Sword of State.^[12]^[13]

Lord Montbatten wrote in his diary that Queen Elizabeth was going to hit [Idi Amin](#) on the head with the pearl sword if he came to her [Silver Jubilee](#) (when she had been Queen for 25 years) in 1977. She was probably joking.

^{[14][15][16]} It was used at her [Diamond Jubilee](#) (60 years).^[17] It was also used at her 90th [official birthday](#).^[18]

State Sword

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The **State Sword** is one half of the Sword and [Mace](#). They are [symbols](#) of the [authority](#) of the Lord Mayor and the [City of London Corporation](#). It is carried by the Sword Bearer. The mace is carried by the [Serjeant-at-Arms](#). The City of London has had a Sword of State since before 1373. The first known sword-bearer of the City was [John Blytone](#). He left the job in 1395.^[19] The current sword is from the middle of the 17th century.^[7] It is also called the Sunday Sword. It was made in about 1670.^[20]

The blade is 3 ft 1½ in (0.953 m) long and 1⅝ in (4.1 cm) wide. The hilt is 12¾ in (32 cm) long and it weighs 5 lb 1¼ oz (2.30 kg) without the scabbard. It used to have a blue and gold pattern on the blade but that has worn off.^[5]

Travelling State Sword

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Because the State Sword is so valuable, it isn't taken outside the City of London. Instead there is a **Travelling State Sword**. It looks the same but it is lighter and slightly longer. It was made by [Wilkinson Sword](#) in 1962 and given to the City by Lord Mayor Sir [Ralph Perring](#).^[21]

It was first taken out of the country to Canada in 1963 by Ralph Perring.

Old Bailey Sword

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[The stone dome at the top of a building, columns below, with a bronze statue on top of a woman with a sword in one hand and a pair of scales in the other](#)
The [Old Bailey](#)

The **Old Bailey Sword** stays at the [Old Bailey](#), which is one of the buildings of the [Crown Court](#) in London. It is on the wall behind the most senior [judge](#).^{[22][23]} The [Cutlers' Society](#) says it was made by Richard Mathew in 1562 or 1563 and given to the City in 1563.^[24]

It has a blade 2 feet 11¾ inches (0.908 m) long and 1⅝ in (4.1 cm) wide, and an 11¼ in (29 cm) hilt. It weighs 3 lb 6¾ oz (1.55 kg) without the scabbard. It has some decorations on the blade, like the Pearl Sword. The

scabbard is covered with crimson (dark red) [velvet](#) and decorated with gold [lace](#) and decorative metal.^[25]

Mansion House Justice Room Sword

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The last sword is the **Mansion House Justice Room Sword**. The Lord Mayor is chief [magistrate](#) of the City, so the Swordbearer's room was made into a [court](#) in 1849. That's where this sword gets its name. Its blade is 2 ft 9⁵/₈ in (85.4 cm) long and 1¹/₂ in (3.8 cm) wide. It has an 11³/₄ in (30 cm) hilt and weighs 4 lb 13 oz (2.2 kg) without the scabbard. It is from around 1830 and it might be [Portuguese](#).^[26]

Swords like this in other cities

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Other cities have swords similar to the City of London's swords. [Bristol](#), [Lincoln](#) and [Exeter](#) each have four. Thirteen other places in Britain have two swords each. So does [Dublin](#).^[27]

The swords of the [Lord Mayor of Bristol](#) are:

- A Mourning Sword from before 1373 when Bristol became a [county corporate](#). It was first used as a Sword of State^{[28][29]}
- A Pearl Sword from the 14th century given by Lord Mayor of London John de Welles^[c] in 1431.^{[27][30]} [Ewart Oakeshott](#) says it is "of superlative quality" (very good) with a "beautiful [silver gilt](#) hilt".^[31]
- A Lent Sword from the 15th century,^[d] which used to be carried at the Lent [assizes](#)^[29]
- A State Sword from 1752. Barrett (2017) says it is a "bit ugly but very big."^[32]

Related pages

[\[change\]](#) | [\[change source\]](#)

- [Sword of State](#)
- [Sword of Justice](#)
- [Crown Jewels of the United Kingdom § Swords](#)

Notes

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- a. [↑] [Wheatley](#) says Hope says 1570, but Mason says 23 January 1571. ^[3] ^[33]
- b. [↑] From *The New York Times*, 15 May 1887: "At the Queen's approach, the Lord Mayor received the pearl sword from the sword bearer. His Worship lowered the point, congratulated her Majesty in coming to the most loyal city, and presented the sword to the Queen. She took it and returned it."
- c. [↑] Sometimes spelled as "de Wells" (Oakeshott), "de Welles" (Evans), "Wells" (Barrett), "Wallis" (on the hilt, says Evans).
- d. [↑] Bristol County Council says about 1459, Barrett (2017) says about 1499.

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- 1. [↑] ^{1.0} ^{1.1} Marsden, Sam (17 April 2013). "[Mourning sword in Thatcher ceremony was last used at Churchill's funeral](#)". *The Daily Telegraph*. Retrieved 19 January 2018.
- 2. [↑] [Pepys 1893](#), p. 11.
- 3. [↑] ^{3.0} ^{3.1} ^{3.2} [Pepys 1893](#), p.11 fn.1.
- 4. [↑] "Thursday, May 28th, 1891". *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of London*. 2. **XIII**: 343. 1891.
- 5. [↑] ^{5.0} ^{5.1} ^{5.2} [Barrett 2017](#), p. 126.
- 6. [↑] [Cassell 1865](#), p. 403.
- 7. [↑] ^{7.0} ^{7.1} ^{7.2} "[The Plate Collection](#)". www.cityoflondon.gov.uk. City of London. Archived from [the original](#) on 19 January 2018. Retrieved 19 January 2018.
- 8. [↑] [Barrett 2017](#), pp. 120–122.
- 9. [↑] "[The Queen in London. Her Majesty Formally Opens The People's Palace](#)" (PDF). *The New York Times*. 15 May 1887. Retrieved 19 January 2018.
- 10. [↑] [Barrett 2017](#), p. 63.
- 11. [↑] Davies, Caroline (5 June 2002). "[Pearl Sword opens City to sovereign](#)". *The Daily Telegraph*. Retrieved 19 January 2018.
- 12. [↑] Black, Jeremy (1 October 2008). *[George III: America's Last King](#)*. Yale University Press. p. 48. [ISBN 978-0-300-14238-9](#).
- 13. [↑] "[The British Sword of State - A Wonderful Sabre of Immense Value](#)". *The Buffalo Commercial*. 15 February 1900. p. 5. Retrieved 12 February 2018.
- 14. [↑] Furness, Hannah (27 December 2013). "[The Queen's plot to bash Idi Amin over the head with a pearl sword](#)". *The Daily Telegraph*. Retrieved 19 January 2018.

15. [↑](#) Withnall, Adam (28 December 2013). ["The Queen 'plotted to hit Idi Amin with a sword' if he visited Britain"](#). *The Independent*. Retrieved 19 January 2018.
16. [↑](#) ["The Queen 'Plotted To Hit Ugandan Dictator Idi Amin With Ceremonial Sword' "](#). *The Huffington Post*. 28 December 2013. Retrieved 19 January 2018.
17. [↑](#) ["Treasures of London - The Pearl Sword"](#). *Exploring London*. 9 August 2013. Retrieved 19 January 2018.
18. [↑](#) Davies, Caroline (10 June 2016). ["Queen's 90th birthday: Attenborough and Welby speak at St Paul's service"](#). *The Guardian*. Retrieved 19 January 2017.
19. [↑](#) [Barrett 2017](#), p. 119.
20. [↑](#) [Barrett 2017](#), pp. 85–86.
21. [↑](#) [Barrett 2017](#), pp. 131–133.
22. [↑](#) Peter; Mark (28 October 2014). [Unseen London](#). Frances Lincoln. p. 107. [ISBN 978-1-78101-187-4](#).
23. [↑](#) [Barrett 2017](#), p. 122.
24. [↑](#) [Welch 1916](#), pp. 222–223.
25. [↑](#) [Barrett 2017](#), pp. 122–123.
26. [↑](#) [Barrett 2017](#), p. 129.
27. [↑](#) [27.0 27.1 Barrett 2017](#), p. 57.
28. [↑](#) [Barrett 2017](#), p. 51.
29. [↑](#) [29.0 29.1 "The history of the Lord Mayor"](#). *bristol.gov.uk*. Bristol County Council. Archived from [the original](#) on 19 January 2018. Retrieved 19 January 2017.
30. [↑](#) [Evans 1824](#), p. 101.
31. [↑](#) [Oakeshott 1964](#), p. 67.
32. [↑](#) [Barrett 2017](#), p. 58.
33. [↑](#) [Mason 1920](#), p. 11.

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