Pikes

1. Pikes are very long spears used by infantry soldiers. They can vary in length from anything between 3m to 7.5m or 10 feet to 25 feet. Pikes have an ancient history, the first use being in wars fought by the Sumerians at around 3000BC. However, their use has been subject to military fashion. Out of fashion during the Bronze Age, they were used to great effect by Alexander the Great. The Romans suffered from them when they attacked German tribes east of the Rhine. They were then out of fashion again until the thirteenth century when the Scots used them to route the English at Bannockburn. This brought them back into fashion and after the Swiss used them to destroy the army of Charles the Rash of Burgundy, they came into widespread use in armies through the centuries that followed until the bayonet combined musket and pike at the end of the Seventeenth Century.
2. Pike wielding soldiers are still with us. The second oldest army organisation in the world (in continuous existence) is the *Honourable Artillery Company*, a territorial (not regular) regiment of the British Army that was formed by Henry VIII on 15th August 1537. It provides a *Company of Pikemen and Musketeers* that escorts the Lord Mayor of London’s Coach at the Lord Mayor’s Show. Sadly, for lovers of the proper long pike, the oldest organisation The Vatican’s Swiss Guard only wield halberds, and the third oldest, Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts makes do with ceremonial short pikes. N.B. There are older army organisations, but they have gaps in their history, notably several old Spanish Regiments and the Royal Militia of the Island of Jersey.