

Title: Medieval Handgonnes  
Author: Sean McLachlan  
Illustrator: Gerry & Sam Embleton  
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I enjoyed reading this book immensely. It is number three in Osprey's new Weapon series and I had not read either of the preceding volumes so I had no idea what to expect. The Weapon series books are split into three sections covering the weapon's development, its use and its impact on the battlefield.

The first section was particularly interesting as it explains why the development of gunpowder and handgonnes were so intimately linked. The importance of gunpowder in medieval warfare is neatly illustrated by data from English Patent Rolls and other sources showing how, between 1346 and 1599, the price of saltpetre, the most expensive component of gunpowder, declined whilst the volume purchased increased significantly. The data shows just how much black powder was being used and not just in sieges. The description of the three main types of gunpowder, their manufacture and transportation needs is really helpful as the properties of the available gunpowder played a large part in the development of the weapons and their use.

There is a very good description of the three main types of handgonnes in the use section and there is a double page photo spread showing how a modern day re-enactor fires a modern replica of a hackbut from 1420-1440. It is quite clear that the different handgonnes co-existed for some considerable time and the author handles the complex issue of how the weapon developed well. A large part of the use section is devoted to a description of handgonne use in the Hussite Wars, the Wars of The Roses and the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. The author is clearly of the opinion that handgonnes were not really specialist weapons rather they were readily available and ideal weapons for peasant armies, like the Hussites, because they were easy to both make and maintain, and were effective en masse against large targets.

The final section on the impact of the handgonne is the shortest of the three and possibly the weakest. There is a second double page spread showing a modern day re-enactor firing a modern replica of an arquebus from 1470 which really should have been in the preceding section but no doubt it has been

moved for reasons of overall layout. This, and the many full page pictures, diminishes the final section. It is mainly concerned with the effectiveness of the handgonne and a discussion of various modern day tests comparing the handgonne with the crossbow and the longbow and their ability to penetrate plate armour. It is at this point that the preceding sections come in to their own as the discussion is all about types of gunpowder and types of handgonne.

I recommend this book to anyone interested in late medieval warfare but I advise you to pay particular attention to the early sections as you will need the information later.