

## DATASHEET 30

### Prick Spurs 700-1700

by

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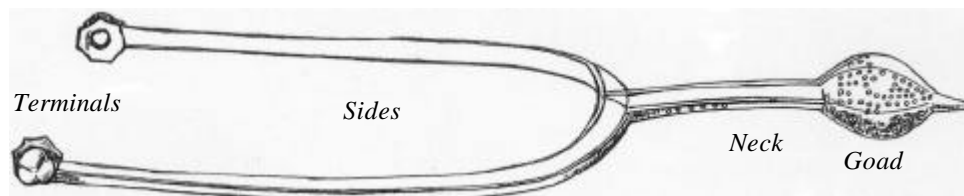
*Candlespur, Reece Lane, Acrise, Folkestone, Kent CT18 8LW*

By AD 700 the use of spurs was well-established in Europe while further east the whip continued to be the preferred riding aid. Their early use in Britain is shown by finds from Roman sites (Shortt 1959, 61-76). Spurs were made from iron or copper alloy; the former were often tinned to protect them from rust and enhance their appearance. As they developed, their importance as a fashion accessory denoting the status of horsemen increased and they were often decorated, silvered and gilded. By the Middle Ages gilded spurs were used in the ceremonies of knighthood and had become symbolic of that rank. A rare spur made of gold with Borre-style decoration, dating from the 10th century, was excavated at Verne Kloster in Østfold, Norway (National Museum of Antiquities, Oslo; Wilson & Klindt-Jensen 1966, 89 & pl. XXIX a-c). Chaucer described the Wife of Bath as wearing ‘..on hir feet a paire of spores sharpe’ (Skeat 1895, 424-5). Women would have worn similar spurs to men but only when it was essential for riding because they would

have been inconvenient with long skirts, which also concealed them, precluding any fashionable interest.

#### Terminology (*Figure 1*)

Spurs with a single goad point were simply called *spurs* before the appearance of the rowel spurs in the thirteenth century. The term *prick spurs* has been in use since at least as early as 1688 (Holme 1688, II 325/1) and possibly derives from the earlier use of ‘pricking’ to describe fast riding. *Spurs* and *buckles* are medieval terms; *leathers* for the straps of spurs was used in the 16th century (for full details and references for terminology see Ellis 1995a, 126-7). The spur-makers of Walsall in Staffordshire call the projection which carries the goad the *neck* of the spur (Plot 1686, 376-7, para 79), unlike American spurriers who call it the ‘shank’. Modern Walsall spur-makers refer to the spur *sides* which flank the wearer’s foot. These have *terminals* at their front ends for the *attachments for the leathers*.



*Figure 1: Terminology*

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