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Creator(s)
I know that if I gave the same collations to the three billhook lookalikes on the Essex coat of arms, Telegraph readers would swiftly fill me in—and so they did. My cutlasses are "seaxes", but what a seaxe ought to be had never left me.

I would have been pleased to discover that they were indeed billhooks, or ancient sickles, or thatcher's hardware to be found with a squared-off end and a deep semicircular notch in the back. Saxons get their name because they were a seaxe-wielding people, though the first unencyclopaedist story about seaxes involves a Jute, namely Hengest, commander-in-chief of the international expediatory force that came from continental Europe in the mid-fifth century to assist Vortigern in his battles against the Picts and Scots.

When Hengest realised that his picked force of Jutes, Saxons, Frisians and Angles could annihilate his British allies, he is supposed to have said: "Let us grab our seaxes and pommels or, and not as you will see on some signs red seaxes on a white ground. These are supposed to be the arms of the ancient kingdom of the East Saxons, and Essex to be a short way of saying East-Saxony or Ost-Sachsen, reminding the inhabitants of their German forebears.

Irresistibly enough, the same device is used in the arms of Mittel-Sachsen or Middlesex, by charging its shield with a Saxon Crown. Other coats of arms have crests, surmounted by prancing beasts or boats or battlements. The arms of Suffolk are surmounted with a whole stack of things, a Viking dragon ship on the sea.

The Essex coat of arms is a Viking dragon ship on the sea (argent azure Barry wavy), which seems a lot nicer than three choppers. But what a seaxe was real. But the seaxes were Englishmen possessed them and took up with them well into the second millennium. The Essex coat of arms in a field gules (that is, a red ground) charged per fesse with three seaxes argent, hilts and pommels or, and not as you will see on some signs red seaxes on a white ground. These are supposed to be the arms of the ancient kingdom of the East Saxons, and Essex to be a short way of saying East-Saxony or Ost-Sachsen, reminding the inhabitants of their German forebears.

East Saxons, and have been used since time immemorial. This is fresh, because heraldry itself did not exist until 700 years or so after Hengest. Even then, the right to bear arms was to be enjoyed by feudal lords rather than county councils and lesser baronets. Three seaxes argent, hilts and pommels or, and not as you will see on some signs red seaxes on a white ground. These are supposed to be the arms of the ancient kingdom of the East Saxons, and Essex to be a short way of saying East-Saxony or Ost-Sachsen, reminding the inhabitants of their German forebears.

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I knew that if I gave the name cutlasses to the three billhook lookalikes on the Essex coat of arms, Telegraph readers would swiftly fill me in — and so they did. My cutlasses are “seaxes”, but what a seaxe might be good for, no one saw fit to tell me.

I would have been pleased to discover that they were instead hill-hammers, or salient sickles, or thatcher’s knives or fish-gutters, but that would hardly fit in with the notion of a Swedish dragon ship on the sea (Urgent azure barry wavy, which seems a trifle odd). So with three seaxes charged on shields, seaxes were things for killing people with.

A seaxe is simply a big knife, shown in heraldry with a squared-off end and a deep semicircular notch in the back. Saxons get their name because they were a seaxe-wielding people, though the first unsavoury story about seaxes involves a Jute, namely Hengest, commander-in-chief of the international expeditionary force that came from continental Europe in the mid-fifth century to assist Vortigern in his battles against the Picts and Scots.

When Hengest realised that his picked force of Jutes, Saxons, Frisians and Angles could annihilate his British allies, he is supposed to have said: “Let us grab our seaxes.” The word is not quite history because nobody is really certain that Hengest was real. But the seaxes were Englishmen possessed them and took up with them well into the second millennium. The Essex coat of arms is a field gules (that is, a red ground), charged with three seaxes argent, hilts and pommels or, and not as you will see it on some signs, red seaxes on a white ground. These are supposed to be the arms of the ancient kingdom of the East Saxons, and Essex to be a short way of saying East Saxony or Ost-Sachsen, reminding the inhabitants of their German forebears. The attributed arms of East Anglia are three gold crowns on a blue ground, which could have been charged with our seaxes to signify that we lie east of Middlesex. Instead, we are just uncrowned Middlesex.

What message are we sending with our wordless seaxes? This is how it strikes a Canadian: seaxes “were implements of war carried at the belt of every Englishman. Other counties have mottoes, but not Essex. Suffolk says: ‘Guide our Endeavour.’ Essex remains silent. Not a lot of creativity was exerted in 1932 when it was decided that Essex had to have a county coat of arms. We just stole the best part of the Middlesex arms and left it at that. The attributed arms of East Anglia are three gold crowns on a blue ground, which could have been charged with our seaxes to signify that we lie east of Middlesex. Instead, we are just uncrowned Middlesex.

Were the Saxons left-handed? Suffolk arms show a red shield with three knives lying cutting edge upwards, handles oddly to the left. Were the Saxons left-handed? The Essex coat of arms is crestless, which is probably a mercy. And there are no supporters, no creatures holding the shield as the lion and the unicorn do the royal arms. All you get is a red shield with three knives lying cutting edge upwards, handles oddly to the left. Were the Saxons left-handed?

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Germaine Greer will give a lecture in aid of a new library in Addis Ababa tomorrow at 5pm at the Ethiopian Embassy, 17 Princes Gate, London SW7.
Kylie,

Herewith Professor Greer's copy, also sent by fax. Please confirm safe receipt.

Carol.
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Other coats of arms have crests, surmounted by prancing beasts or knightly helms or boats or battlements. The arms of Suffolk are surmounted with a whole stack of things, a Viking dragon ship on the sea within a crown on top of a helm. Essex is crestless, which is probably a mercy. And there are no supporters, no creatures holding the shield as the lion and the unicorn do the royal arms, and the kangaroo and emu the arms of Australia. All you get is a red shield with three knives lying cutting edge upwards, handles oddly to the left. Were the Saxons left-handed? Suffolk arms show a blazing sun rising over the sea (argent azure barry wavy) which seems a lot nicer than three choppers. Other counties have mottoes, but not Essex. Suffolk says 'Guide our Endeavour'. Essex remains stumm. Not a lot of creativity was exerted in 1932 when it was decided that
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