

# Let battle commence



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HERE I was, standing in a Northamptonshire field dressed in a 17th century soldier's doublet and chatting to a very nice peasant lady with a gaping, bloody flesh wound to her forehead.

But it all felt very normal. And the reason? I was visiting the grounds of Kelmarsh Hall to meet some members of the internationally acclaimed historical re-enactment group, the Sealed Knot.

The group, which now has more than 4,500 members, regularly meets to perform re-enactments of the 17th century English Civil War, playing out scenes from once-fought skirmishes, and edu-

cating the public about period costume, diets and medicines.

The charity's next major event will be held this weekend at Kelmarsh, from May 3 to 5, running each day from 11am to 4pm, as a celebration of the Sealed Knot's 40th anniversary.

Historical displays will be staged throughout the event and there will also be a large-scale re-enactment of the 1645 Battle of Naseby; an event which happened just a couple of miles away from Kelmarsh.

The Sealed Knot has been a major player in a recent project to buy a section of the historic Naseby Battlefield site. A group including the Knot, histo-

rians and Naseby residents clubbed together to buy the 25-acre, £250,000 piece of land near Mill Hill Farm.

The hope is that, eventually, a £10 million visitor centre and museum will be built at the site but, if this goes ahead, it is not expected to be completed until 2014 at the earliest.

Sealed Knot spokesman Michael Molcher said: "The English Civil War was one of the most important moments in our history. It was the first time in history where people stood up for a moral cause. Before that, we fought for whoever our lord and master told us to."

The English Civil War was a time when civil strife engulfed England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland between the 1630s and 1650s. The war included a series of armed conflicts between the parliamentarians and the royalists.

The war led to the trial and execution of Charles I and the exile of his son, Charles II. Meanwhile, the monarchy was replaced with the Commonwealth of England and then the Protectorate,

ruled by Oliver Cromwell.

It is a passion for the importance of these events in British history which leads so many thousands of people to join the Sealed Knot, dress up in 17th century clothing and attend events throughout the country to educate the public about the civil war.

Michael, who has been a member of the Knot for just over two years, said: "People think you are a bit weird to begin with, but once you explain and people see your enthusiasm and that there are educational aspects of it, they understand."

Michael, a former journalist who now works as a press officer for Leeds Council, added: "It is something I have always wanted to do. I went to a re-enactment as a child and I wanted to join up. Many people who want to do Sealed Knot join because of their friends, or they

have a family member involved. We have a lot of Sealed Knot babies.

"It is dressing up and doing battles in a field, but also there is the beer tent in the evening and the parties when the public have gone home."

Having seen the Sealed Knot in action, I was a bit alarmed by the number of muskets being fired (albeit that blanks were being used) and by the people walking around with large spiked poles, which I was told are called 'pikes'.

But Michael reassured me that being a Sealed Knot member is a safe activity. All those who fire muskets must be properly licensed to use firearms and gunpowder.

He said: "Taking part in re-enactments is very physical but the number of injuries is actually quite low. You have people walking into a field who might

be a bit unfit but it is not dangerous."

Anne Rhodes, aged 63, was employed as a nurse at the time when she joined the Sealed Knot in 1980. Working as part of the Knot's Living History section, she steps back in time to adopt a similar role, informing the public about how medicines would have been used to treat wounds and diseases in the 17th century.

She said: "They knew about amputations back then but it was as in 'drink this beer, get drunk and we will chop your leg off.'"

To find out more about Sealed Knot activities and how to become a member of the society, log onto [www.thesealedknot.org.uk](http://www.thesealedknot.org.uk)

See video of the Sealed Knot  
[www.northamptonchron.co.uk](http://www.northamptonchron.co.uk)

## Tying THE KNOT



■ Rusty and Tom Aldwinckle

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IT seems that, for lonely singletons looking to find that perfect match, joining the Sealed Knot is a very good step to take.

Although definitely a historical re-enactment group and not a dating agency, many members have found love while borrowing some gunpowder, firing a musket or healing a fake bleeding wound...all in the name of recreating the English Civil War period.

Northamptonshire woman Rusty Aldwinckle, 56, fell in love with her now husband and fellow 'parliamentarian', Tom Aldwinckle, 48, soon after joining the Sealed Knot. They met when he visited her to lend her a 17th century costume to wear.

The pair married on November 5 two years ago and the celebration was given a 17th century civil war period theme. After the ceremony – in which Tom, Rusty and guests dressed in clothes of the period – the newlyweds were invited to the home of the gunpowder plot, Ashby St Ledgers, to light their Guy Fawkes' night bonfire.

Tom, a quality development manager, has been a member for 31 years. He said: "The wedding felt perfectly natural for us as we had met through the group. Some of our family and friends dressed normally."

Rusty said: "We went from our reception to Ashby St Ledgers, and it was a great honour. There are not many people who can say they did that for their wedding."

The pair are now both dedicated Sealed Knot members and, between them, they believe they have collected together about £30,000 worth of 17th century-style equipment, such as pewter plates. The Aldwinckles are expecting to fill about six display tents with objects when they attend the Knot's 'major muster' at Kelmarsh this weekend.

The couple find meetings and re-enactments a great way to relax after a week at work. Tom said: "It is a total break from day to day life and, no joke, I will literally leave a note on my desk on Friday as I have no doubt that I won't remember what I was planning to do by Monday."

'Real life' accountant Rusty commented: "It is the biggest stress release you could come across. You leave work behind at 5pm on Friday. No one discusses work or anything about it until you go back on Monday. You don't know what the other members do in real life and people aren't interested."

### What's KNOT to like?



■ The society was founded in 1968 by Brigadier Peter Young, a distinguished soldier and respected authority on the civil wars, after a party was held in which guests dressed in Cavalier costume.

The concept of forming an army of that time was discussed and proved to be popular. Within two years, membership had soared to more than 1,000 people and a parliamentary army was also formed.

■ The Sealed Knot has taken part in re-enactments or 'musters' at sites including castles and stately homes. The era focused upon is that of the 17th century English Civil War.

■ Members also get involved with discussions and lectures, the publication of books and making of documentaries about the period.

■ It is now believed to be the largest re-enactment organisation in the country and one

of the biggest in the world. ■ Roles include military or civilian pikemen, musketeers, drummers, horsemen, medics or artillerymen. Each member belongs to a specific regiment.

■ The society is non profit-making, but has over the years raised money for other charities.

■ The Sealed Knot's name comes from a group which plotted for the restoration of the monarchy.

