

CONVERTING THE MASSES

by Neil 'Mad Converter' Roberts

In this short article, neil Roberts shows us how to make great hand-weapons easily from scratch.

There are two parts to each weapon; the bit you hold (the handle) and the bit you stick into your enemy (the head). At the most basic level there are three types of head – sharp, edged and blunt as seen in spear, sword and mace, for instance. There are likewise three types of handle – short, medium and long. Short and medium represent one and two-handed weapons while long handles represent the very intelligent idea of putting as much distance as possible between yourself and the person who's trying to hit you.

There are exceptions to the above (a staff is all handle and no blade, and a throwing dagger is all blade and no handle) but look at it this way – only half as much weapon to sculpt! There, doesn't that feel better?

TOOLS AND MATERIALS

The basic tool kit consists of a pin drill and bits, a sharp hobby knife, your standard sculpting tools, a pair of wire-cutters and various needle files. If you have an electrical hobby drill with a set of abrasive and cutting heads, all the better, but they're not essential. All the examples you'll see were done with the basic kit. I use two sculpting tools, by the way. For modelling putty I use an old dentist's tool which I've never seen anywhere else but which is similar to the GW sculpting tool, while for Green Stuff I use a Wax 5 professional sculpting tool.

I recommend cleaning your tools thoroughly before using with different modelling compounds. The list of materials is slightly longer. Various thicknesses of plasticard are nice, but you can get away with just one thin grade sheet for most projects. Brass tubing, the types that fit nicely into each other like Russian dolls, for some weapon types is essential for. Masking tape often gets used, as does steel wire from my local fishing tackle shop. For glue I don't bother with plastic glue, only superglue, and I round out my materials with some scrap copper wire, fuse wire, solder and, of course, modelling putty and Green Stuff.

Realistically whatever does the job can be considered part of your materials. I've used everything from plastic BBs to children's toys, jewellery to electrical components.

HANDLES AND HAFTS

High tech hafts and handles are the easiest. If you look at the mace you can see that there is a central core of brass rod. From the brass tube that fits snugly over this rod I cut several rings of various lengths and then glued these into place leaving gaps to make both interesting variations on the haft and also the section that would be held. Originally I

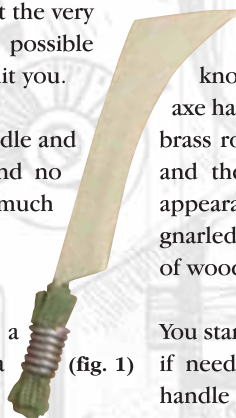
wrapped that section with a thin ribbon of masking tape cut for the purpose and wrapped as you would a bandage. Unfortunately this didn't look as nice as I'd hoped it would, so off it came, but I have used it on other weapons in the past.

Wooden hafts are my favourite, as anyone who's seen my Golden Demon 2003 entry will know. Smooth wood, as on a spear shaft or modern axe handle, is mostly in the painting so I just use plain brass rod for this. Small lumps of Green Stuff added and then smoothed out can give a more organic appearance, especially on a rounded end. But it's gnarled wood that I most enjoy sculpting, the kind of wood that still has bark over its twisted core.

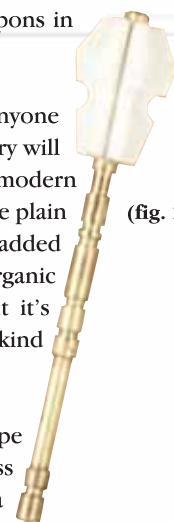
You start off with a rod or wire core (bent to shape if need be as you can see from the bladeless handle in the examples) around which you put a thin layer of Green Stuff. When this is cured wrap another layer around the section you wish to sculpt, let it harden a little and then draw parallel lines down it with your sculpting tool – it's that simple.

Okay, not quite. There are some things that you can do to make it more interesting. Wavering the lines and varying their thickness for instance, just like with real bark, helps give the weapon some character. I also add splits to the bark, prising the sculpted lines apart and easing the point under the edges to lift them up slightly. In this way you can see the wood inside and, again, it adds character.

There's nothing to stop you doing a whole haft like this, but I like to vary texture wherever I can.



(fig. 1)



(fig. 2)



I wrap fuse wire or solder wire around some sections as you can see on the handle of the hooked knife. Thin cloth, as I've previously said, I do with narrow strips of masking tape but heavier cloth and leather strip are sculpted on. While the Green Stuff is fresh I use the blade of my Wax-5 to mark out the edges of the cloth or leather strips. When the Green Stuff has cured a little and isn't as soft I use the rounded end of the tool to push the centre of the strip down slightly and the blade to sharpen the outside edge. Again, it's practice that make perfect here, but you can see the end result on several of the examples shown.

One more thing – knots. I add little blobs of Green Stuff which I then trim into rough triangles for the body of the knots, but I leave the trailing ends of cloth until after I've added the weapon to the figure because gravity effects how they would hang. Often I'll sculpt these trailing ends on a ceramic tile, pop them off when they're cured and glue them into place.

BLADES AND HEADS

There are two ways I make blades: either with thin or thick plasticard. At the most basic level you cut out the desired shape and then sharpen it. It's that easy.

For narrow blades, like sabres or daggers, carefully mark out the basic shape on a sheet of thick plasticard (I use some 1.2mm thick sheet). Cut around it leaving a margin outside the marked area and then trim it carefully to shape using your sharp knife. You now have a very blunt blade. Using one of your rougher needle files, draw it diagonally along the blade, starting to sharpen the edge of the 'blade'. Keep turning it over while you do this so that each side is sharpened evenly and the blade is symmetrical. When you have the basic edge roughed out use a finer file to smooth it to a finished point. I warn you now that your first blade will be rough and uneven, fit for a cultist or a bodyguard, but not a noble Inquisitor. Practice makes perfect. Of course you can also use your files and knife to notch and distress a pristine blade if you want – it all depends on the character you're arming.

If you don't have any thick plasticard than use thin sheet and thicken it. It's tempting to make up a sandwich of plasticard by gluing sheets together, but the bond often won't survive the sharpening process if you use superglue and if you use plastic glue it deforms the sheets. Instead I use modelling putty, adding a thin layer to each side of the plasticard and letting it cure. The bonus with this option is that during sharpening I know when I've reached the centre of the blade. That's when I uncover the plasticard.

This is exactly the same technique that I use for broad blades such as the long hooked knife (fig. 1).

Shaped heads, like axes or the primitive cutting spear in the examples, are just a variation on this theme

Last but not least, are blunt headed weapons. Rocks bound onto sticks aside, there are several types of blunt weapons. A staff is all handle and no head, a maul is also essentially a haft with no head – a short staff if you will – and can be made by adding a few studs to the handle you've already made. Club? Big stick – again just a modified handle. That leaves my mace.

The most notable feature of my mace is the vaned head. This looks hard to do, but was really quite easy, just time consuming. I marked and cut the same basic shape six times from thick plasticard, smoothed the back and ends of each and then taped them together into one very thick chunk of plastic with one very irregular and rough face. I marked the shape of the leading edge I wanted on the top of the 'block' and then used my pin drill, knife and files to carve it to shape. Once shaped I just removed the tape and smoothed off a few rough edges. Voila – six vanes. These were then glued into place on the preconstructed haft. (fig. 2)

Lastly – hammers. I've never made one, but if I did I would go about it the same basic way as I made the technological haft, with telescoping brass rod. Add a face plate made from plasticard, attach it to a haft and bingo – one hammer much like Preacher Josef's. A primitive hammer-head could be made as a sculpted rock which is then attached to a 'wooden' haft – it's your choice.

LAST STEP

Once you have both handle and head just glue them together, pinning them wherever possible to give them strength. And that's it. You can also see two variations on the themes above in the examples I've done – a bone knife with leather covering on the handle (which, with its separate strands of stitching, is more sculpted than any weapon I've done before) and a muck rake. (fig. 3)

It was late at night and I was watching 'Monkey' on TV – I make no excuses. Anyway, until next time, it's over to you. Time to arm the masses...

Author

Neil Roberts hails from sunny Cornwall. He spends his days walking idyllic coastline and making 'mad' conversions to Inquisitor models.

Look out for more of Neil's conversions in a future issue.

Further Information

Green Stuff can be purchased from most hobby and Games Workshop stores. Brass wire and plasticard can be purchased from all good art & craft shops.

More Inq Website

Go to page 48 for the Bounty Hunter Masterclass. www.Exterminatus.com

(fig. 3)