



## Shillelagh

Shillelagh (pronounced sha-lei-lee) is a wooden walking stick, club or cudgel, typically made from a stout knotty stick with a large knob on the end. They were traditionally made from oak and later, and perhaps more commonly, were made from blackthorn wood. It is named after the Shillelagh forest in County Wicklow, Ireland, an oak forest, which produced some fine examples.



The wood is smeared with butter and placed up a chimney to cure, giving the Shillelagh its typical black shiny appearance. Other methods of curing the wood included placing the wood in a dung heap. Shillelaghs are commonly the length of a walking stick. Most also have a heavy knob as a handle which can be used for striking as well as parrying and disarming an opponent. They may be hollowed at the heavy "hitting" end and filled with molten lead to increase the weight beyond the typical two pounds; this sort of Shillelagh is known as a 'loaded stick'.

Methods of Shillelagh fighting have evolved over a period of thousands of years, from the spear, staff, axe and sword fighting of the Irish. There is some evidence which suggests that the use of Irish stick weapons may have evolved in a progression from a reliance on long spears and wattles, to shorter spears and wattles, to the shillelagh, alpeen, blackthorn walking-stick and short cudgel. By the 19th century, Irish shillelagh-fighting had evolved into a practice which involved the use of three basic types of weapons, sticks which were long, medium or short in length.

If you are interested in this martial arts aspect of the blackthorn, you should read *Defensive Exercises*, by Donald Walker (1840).