

Arms and Armour of the Wallace Collection

Dates	Wednesdays 18, 25 November and 2 December 2026
Times	18.00–20.00 BST
Location	Online (Zoom)
Tutor	Keith Downen
Level	All Levels



Falchion belonging to Cosimo I de' Medici, c. 1550 © Wallace Collection

Course Description

In celebration of our new display, *Cosimo I de' Medici: Art and Dynasty*, join us to explore the many facets of European arms and armour history, including how these remarkable objects were made, decorated and used, both on and off the battlefield. Through the study of a wide range of outstanding pieces, from the finest medieval mail and plate to superlative 19th-century sporting guns, learn how arms and armour served a dual function, as both practical tools of war and potent symbols of political power, social status and cultural identity.

Session One – Making and Decorating

This first session explores the production and decoration of arms and armour from the Middle Ages to the early modern era. Through key pieces in the Collection, we'll trace the materials and techniques employed by specialist craftsmen in the creation of works of remarkable technical virtuosity and outstanding artistic merit. The session will also examine the role of princely patronage in driving innovation and consider the contributions of

renowned artists, including Hans Holbein and Albrecht Dürer, to the design of arms and armour.

Session Two – Authority and Identity

As traditional symbols of the warrior class, arms and armour not only served a practical purpose but also functioned as powerful expressions of status, authority, and identity. Focusing on the Wallace's outstanding collection of princely arms and armour, this session will explore the roles these objects played both on and off the battlefield in fashioning perceptions of elite masculinity. It will consider the reception of the ancient world and the ways in which classical imagery and ideas were mobilised as a currency of power.

Session Three – Sport and Hunting

In our final session, we will explore the exhilarating worlds of sport and hunting. Drawing on a rich array of visual and textual sources, we will trace the evolution of the tournament, from the gritty mock combats of the early Middle Ages to the elaborate and highly choreographed spectacles of the Renaissance. Our attention will then turn to hunting weapons, from the simple spear to the technically sophisticated wheellock rifle. Along the way, we will examine how men and women used hunting to demonstrate strength, skill and social status, as well as how it served as an important tool of diplomacy.

Course Tutor

Keith Downen is an historian, archaeologist and authority on arms and armour. Formerly Curator of Arms and Armour at the Wallace Collection, he has worked with many national and international institutions including the Royal Armouries in Leeds, where he served as Assistant Curator. He is a Fellow of both the Society of Antiquaries and Royal Historical Society and has published and lectured widely on all aspects of arms and armour and military history.

Joining Information and Format

This course will be taught through [Zoom Webinar](#). Each course session duration is 120 minutes, including a five-minute break and time for Q&A with the tutor.

Tickets are for all dates. Ticket holders will be emailed the Zoom link, Webinar ID and Passcode 24 hours in advance of the first course session, which should be retained for accessing all sessions of the course.

Course Recording

This course will be recorded. Within 48 hours of each course session, ticket holders will be emailed a link to view the recording, which will be available for two weeks.
