

The Story of European Armour

Dates	Wednesday 8 and Thursday 9 June 2022
Times	11.00-13.00 BST
Location	Online (Zoom Webinar)
Tutor	Dr Tobias Capwell
Level	All Levels



Attributed to Kolman Helmschmid (armourer) and Daniel Hopfer (etcher), Parts of an Armour, about 1525 to about 1530

Course Description

As a protective system designed to augment the human body, the development of armour in Europe followed paths and patterns remarkably reminiscent of biological evolution in the natural world. Follow the story of these 'artificial exoskeletons' across more than a thousand years, as a remarkable creature - the élite armoured warrior - evolved to survive in a dangerous and ever-changing environment.

We'll also consider the role of the aristocratic fighting man as a kind of living work of art, a walking embodiment of the Divine Right of Kings, and a proof of God's will that the European nobility should wield ultimate power on Earth. In this way, we will delve deep into armour as technology, while also considering the ways in which the aesthetic qualities of decorative and expressive art are a natural product of the quest for functional perfection.

Session One: About 600 to 1450

Our story begins in the early Middle Ages, when fragments and memories of Greek and Roman technology and culture began to fuse into new forms, the concept of the warrior of the 'Dark Ages' slowly evolving into the medieval knight. We'll see how fundamental limitations in metalworking technology influenced the design and form of protective equipment made of metal, and explore the problems of evidence and interpretation in an age from which very little armour is preserved. Many great artistic achievements will present themselves to us along the way, including the royal burial treasures of Sutton Hoo, Vendel and Valsgarde, and the Bayeux Tapestry.

Moving into the High Middle Ages, we'll consider how advances in iron smelting and steel production eventually allowed the entire body to be encased in metal. As a well as a technical marvel, the complete 'harness' took on unique sculptural qualities, becoming an art-form which, while governed by the human anatomy, also proved able to transcend it.

Session Two: About 1450 to 1815

In our second session we'll continue into the Renaissance, which can be considered a Golden Age of armour - a time when the technology was at the height of its effectiveness, relevance and importance. We'll trace the awe-inspiring technical and artistic achievements of master armourers active in the late-15th and 16th centuries, as diverse regional and functional styles proliferated across Europe. We'll examine the mechanical marvels of South German armour-making, and admire the sculptural presence of armours of the Italian Renaissance Heroic style. We'll also consider how great Renaissance princes, including the German Emperor Maximilian I and King Henry VIII of England, used armour and images of themselves in armour to project their glory, power and prestige.

Finally, we'll discover that the long relationship between armoured warriors and gunpowder weapons was not always an antagonistic 'arms race' as is often thought. Ultimately however, the power of modern explosives and ranged weapons did bring about the decline and disappearance of the mounted knight, but this was not, by any means, the end of armour.

Course Tutor

Dr Tobias Capwell is Curator of Arms and Armour at the Wallace Collection, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and a Freeman of the Armourers Company of London. He is the author of numerous books, including *Armour of the English Knight 1450-1500* (2021), *Arms and Armour of the Renaissance Joust* (2020), and *Masterpieces of European Arms and Armour at the Wallace Collection* (2011). At the Collection, he has curated the special exhibitions *The Noble Art of the Sword: Fashion and Fencing in Renaissance Europe 1520-1630* (2012) and *Henry Moore: The Helmet Heads* (2018).

Dr Capwell can be seen regularly on screen as historical advisor for the new feature film *The Lost King* (Pathé, 2022), and as a presenter and expert, most recently on *Tony Robinson's History of Britain* (Channel 5, 2022) and *How Real Is It? Duels* (Youtube/Insider, 2022). He is a founding member of the modern historical martial arts community and has fought in armour in major tournaments and jousts all over the world. In 2015, he had the unique honour of serving as one of two armoured horsemen escorting the remains of King Richard III from the battlefield at Bosworth, to their final resting place in Leicester Cathedral.

Previous Skills, Knowledge or Experience

None required. This course is designed as an introduction to the subject.

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 both 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 both 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 one week only.
