

Exploring Armour

Information and Answers

- This trail is for children to use individually or in small groups, with as much adult help as they need. Use the map to help you find your way around.
- Refer to this sheet as you follow the trail as it gives interesting facts as well as answers. If you have any queries or need to ask for directions, the wardens in the Castle and the stewards in St George's Chapel will be happy to help.

Armour helmets to look out for

You will see lots of different styles of helmet – including ones with ears! – on the **Grand Staircase** (after you have seen Queen Mary's Dolls' House) and in **St George's Hall**.

QUEEN MARY'S DOLLS' HOUSE

Read this before you enter – it's quite dark here!

The two figures wearing armour stand in the entrance hall. The one on the right is holding a **lance**. The scale ratio of the objects in Queen Mary's Dolls' House is **1 to 12** – in other words, in real life, the armour would be **12** times as big as it is here!

THE GRAND VESTIBULE

You can see matching armour for protecting the head of Prince Henry's horse, and gilding (gold put onto metal) on all of the armour pieces in the case.

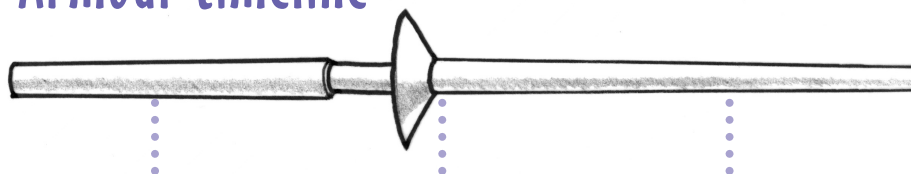
Another form of decoration was called etching. This was done by covering the armour in wax or varnish, then drawing designs and patterns with a sharp needle into the wax or varnish. An acid was then added to eat away at the metal that could be seen through the needle marks. The wax or varnish was then cleaned off and the metal showed beautiful designs 'etched' in the armour.

In the Grand Vestibule there are examples of Indian armour and weapons that look quite different from the European items you have just seen.

THE KING'S DRAWING ROOM

There are four paintings of people wearing armour. The armour in the picture facing the window is a blue-ish colour. When you fill in the missing colours in the word puzzle, which are **RED**, **GOLD**, **BLUE** and **PURPLE**, the word **ARMOUR** appears down the middle!

Armour timeline



800s

Armour included a helmet, a padded jacket under a shirt of mail, and a shield. Mail was made of thousands of small iron wire rings joined together to make a sort of cloth that was flexible but strong.

1200s

A new helmet, called the helm, was designed to give added face protection. It covered the face completely, except for two slits for the eyes, and some holes to enable the wearer to breathe easily.

1300s

Iron breast and back plates were added over the mail to give better protection against arrows, swords, and other weapons. Arm and leg protection was also now worn.

THE QUEEN'S GUARD CHAMBER

As guns became ever more powerful, plate metal armour had to be made thicker to enable it to withstand the force of bullets and other ammunition propelled by the igniting of gunpowder. This however meant it became very heavy for people to wear and items such as gauntlets for the hands and greaves and sabatons for legs and feet were dispensed with. Eventually the wearing of metal armour ceased completely.

ST GEORGE'S HALL

The King's Champion is holding a gauntlet or glove. His armour has lots of gold on it, and it matches the horse's armour. The King's Champion rode into the coronation banquet of a new king or queen, threw down his gauntlet three times and challenged anyone to deny the new Sovereign. When nobody did, he backed his horse out of the hall – a difficult feat!

THE LANTERN LOBBY

The armour belonged to King Henry VIII who, at about 1.9m (6 feet 2 inches) was very tall for a man of his period. The armour weighs nearly 41 kilos (90 lbs), about 1½ times the average suit, and was made at the Royal Armoury the King had set up at Greenwich near London.

The four basic steps of armour making were:

- **In the Hammer Mill**, bars of steel were thinned out by a hammer, usually driven by a water mill, to make sheets.
- **In the Forge**, three-dimensional armour pieces were made from the sheets. The steel was heated so it was easier to hammer and shape into individual pieces, such as a breastplate.
- **At the Polishing Mill**, the armour was cleaned, which removed the hammer marks, and then polished or glazed.
- **In the Armoury**, the armourers added the last touches, such as rolled edges and decoration, and made sure that the pieces fitted well together. A gilder might have added gold for the really special pieces.

THE GRAND VESTIBULE

The rose and the thistle shown in the trail, together with the fleur-de-lys, decorate each armour piece, and Prince Henry's initials H P can also be seen on many of them.

ST GEORGE'S CHAPEL *(closed Sundays)*

Founded by King Edward III in 1348, the Most Noble Order of the Garter is Britain's oldest and most senior order of knighthood. It consists of the Sovereign, the Prince of Wales and twenty four Knights Companions. In addition, there are Royal Knights (including the Duke of Edinburgh) and Stranger Knights (other royal families). A fine example of the Garter symbol shown in the trail can be seen on a house opposite the Chapel.

Jousting Lance



1400s

Full suit plate armour covered the whole body and was the best protection made. Armour had simple designs on it and was brightly polished. Its rounded shape helped swords and arrows slide off harmlessly.

1500s

Steel became the preferred material for armour since it was much stronger than iron. Some suits of armour were so richly decorated, for example with gold, that this cost more than making the armour itself.

1600s

Metal armour was worn less and less because guns became more powerful. Bullets could go through the metal unless it was very thick, but then it was too heavy for people to wear.