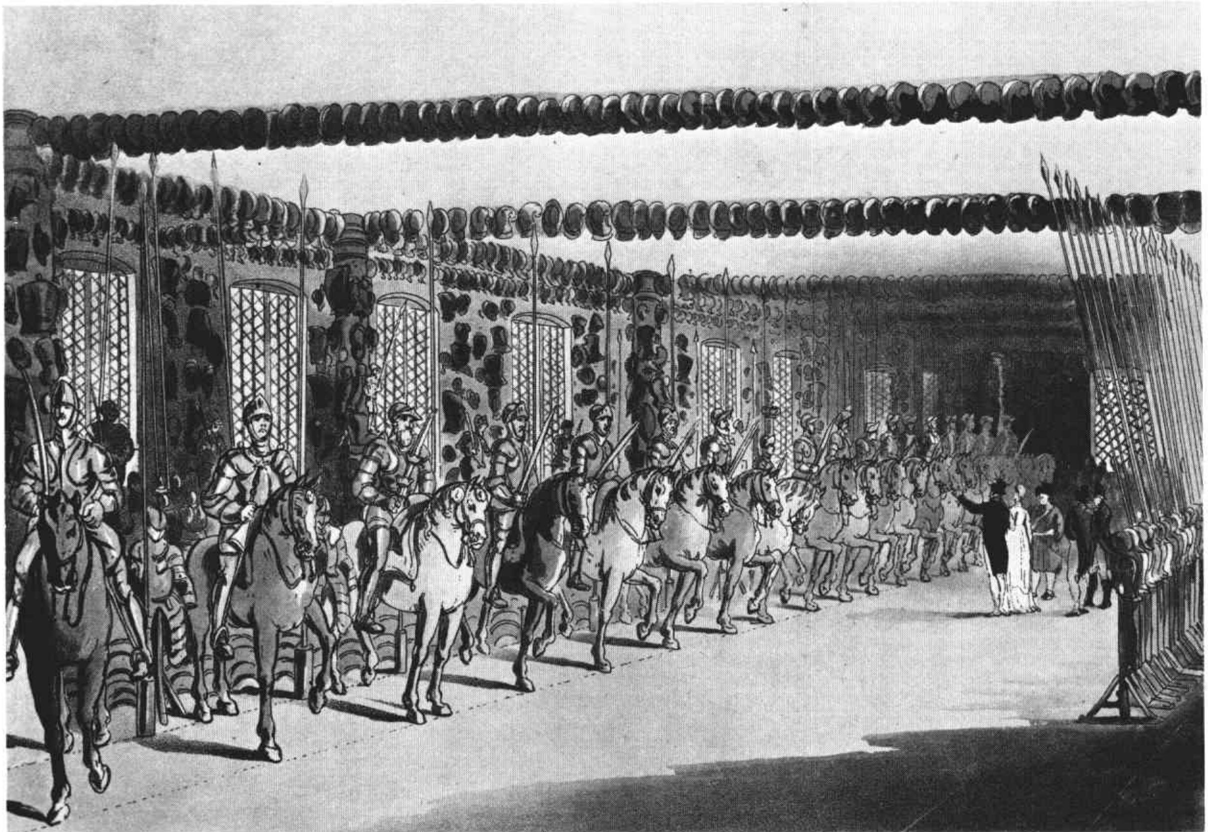
A general view of the Tower.



The Line of Kings in 1809 by Thomas Rowlandson.

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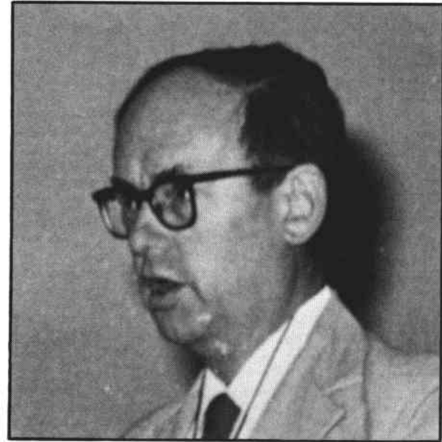
Arms and Armour Collections In and Around London

By Claude Blair

THE TOWER



There must have been armouries in London from the time of its foundation by the Romans shortly after 43 A.D. The earliest certain evidence we have for one comes, however, from the early 13th Century and relates, hardly surprisingly, to that ancient royal palace, the Tower of London. There were no doubt armouries in the Tower at its foundation during the reign of William the Conqueror, and it has contained one ever since, which as recently as 1915, included arms for current use as well as historical pieces. The basis of the collection of the present Tower of London Armouries is, in fact, the old personal armoury — or perhaps one should say armouries — of successive monarchs, combined with the old national arsenal. The historical pieces only became such through obsolescence, and as recently as the 1920s Charles ffoulkes, the first modern Master of the Armouries, was still finding important ones classified merely as "obsolete" in military establishments all over the country.

The main reason for the existence of the national armoury in the Tower is, of course, the obvious one that the building was the main strong-point of the capital city. It was also — from the 13th century at least — the place where the royal wardrobe department was situated, and this came to include the armoury. The department naturally attracted appropriate craftsmen to it, so the Tower also became a place where armour and arms were made, assembled and tested for royal service — which was originally the same as what would now be called governmental service — and it was to retain this position until the early 19th century.

Thus, for the greater part of its history, the Tower's role has been an entirely practical one. But by at least as early as the last quarter of the 16th century it had begun also to be a show place, though to what extent access was organised on a regular basis, or was merely a matter of allowing a limited number of privileged people to see the Armouries on application, is uncertain. From 1660, with the restoration of King Charles II to the throne after the upheavals of the Civil Wars, a deliberate effort was made to organise the antique armour and arms as a display for regular public inspection. Since then the Armouries have always had a museum element which, since the 19th century, has become increasingly important, until now, of course, it is the only reason for their existence.

The Tudor and early Stuart kings had preferred to keep their main personal armoury in their favourite palace at Greenwich, a few miles east of London. This was partly looted during the Civil Wars, but the most important contents were brought to the Tower to become, in turn, what was probably the most important part of the collection there. From it was largely formed what for the next two hundred years or so was to be the main display in the Armouries, *The Line of Kings.* This was a series of equestrian figures, first recorded in 1660, which eventually represented, with a few gaps in the Middle Ages, English kings from William the Conqueror onwards. They were said to be wearing the actual personal arms of the kings concerned, but, though some were, the majority were wildly anachronistic: none of the medieval kings, for instance, wore a medieval armour, and William the Conqueror — whose *musket* was also shown — wore an armour of ca. 1580! The artists responsible for producing the wooden heads and horses for these figures, incidentally, included no less a person than Grinling Gibbons.

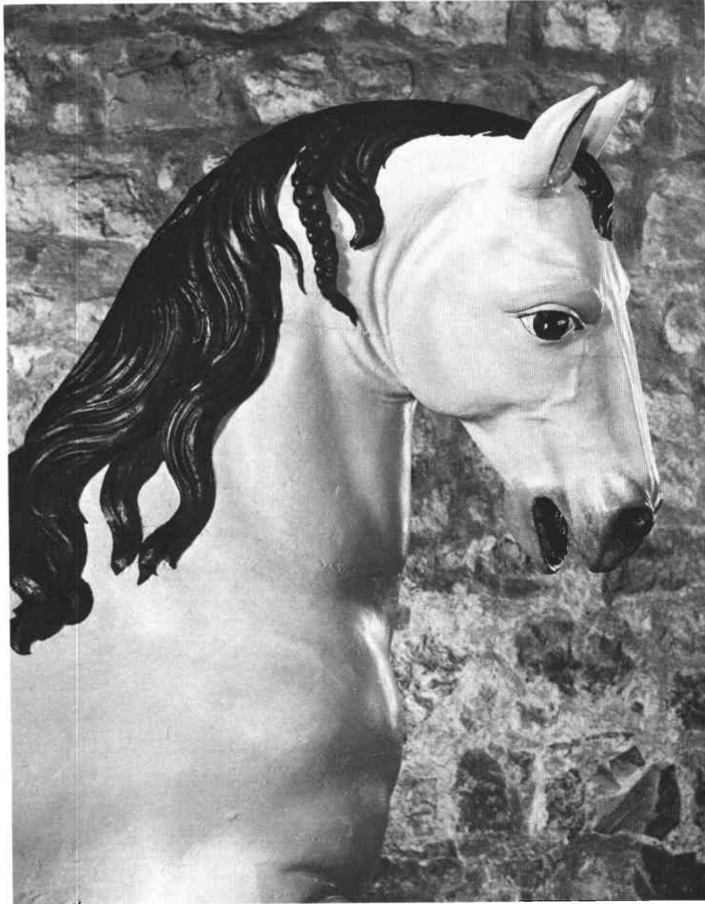
The 1660 reorganisation formed the basis of the Armouries as they exist today, so we can now turn and look at a few of the pieces that were included in it.

No arms or armour dating from before the reign of Henry VIII (1509–47) is known to survive from the old Armouries, though, incidentally, you can see the Black Prince's helm and other equipment at Canterbury Cathedral, and Henry V's at Westminster Abbey. The reason why the Armouries only begin — so far as their old contents are concerned — with Henry VIII seems to be that he was himself responsible for reorganising them completely, and he remains their dominating figure. The number and fate of his wives give him a popular image that conceals the real man. Though no doubt a gross monster at the time of his death, he was an attractive figure in his youth: handsome, athletic, a good scholar and musician, and also an art patron; he was very much the new king of the Renaissance. He patronised foreign artists, and brought many to work in England for him, including Italian, Flemish and German armourers, the last of whom he established at Greenwich in

1515 in a Court workshop — known as the Almain Armoury — that was to survive until the outbreak of the Civil Wars in 1642.

The earliest surviving piece associated with Henry is the grotesque, horned helmet, once decorated with silver-gilt, that is all that remains of an armour made by the Emperor Maximilian I's Court-armourer, Konrad Seusenhofer of Innsbruck, and given to him by the Emperor in 1514. Contemporary with this is an elaborate set of armour for horse and man, of which the man's armour at least was probably made for the King by his Milanese armourers, who also worked at Greenwich. Both are silvered and engraved all over with the devices of Henry and his first wife Katherine of Aragon and scenes from the lives of St. Barbara and St. George, executed by Paul van Vrelant of Brussels, also working over here.

Of the other three complete armours at the Tower made for Henry, one, a special armour for the foot-tournament, known as a "tonlet," is a contemporary assemblage of pieces



Head of a horse carved by Grinling Gibbons for the Line of Kings.

Grotesque helmet, all that remains of a silver-decorated armour by Konrad Seusenhofer of Insbruck presented to Henry VIII by the Emperor Maximilian in 1514. Note the eyeglasses.

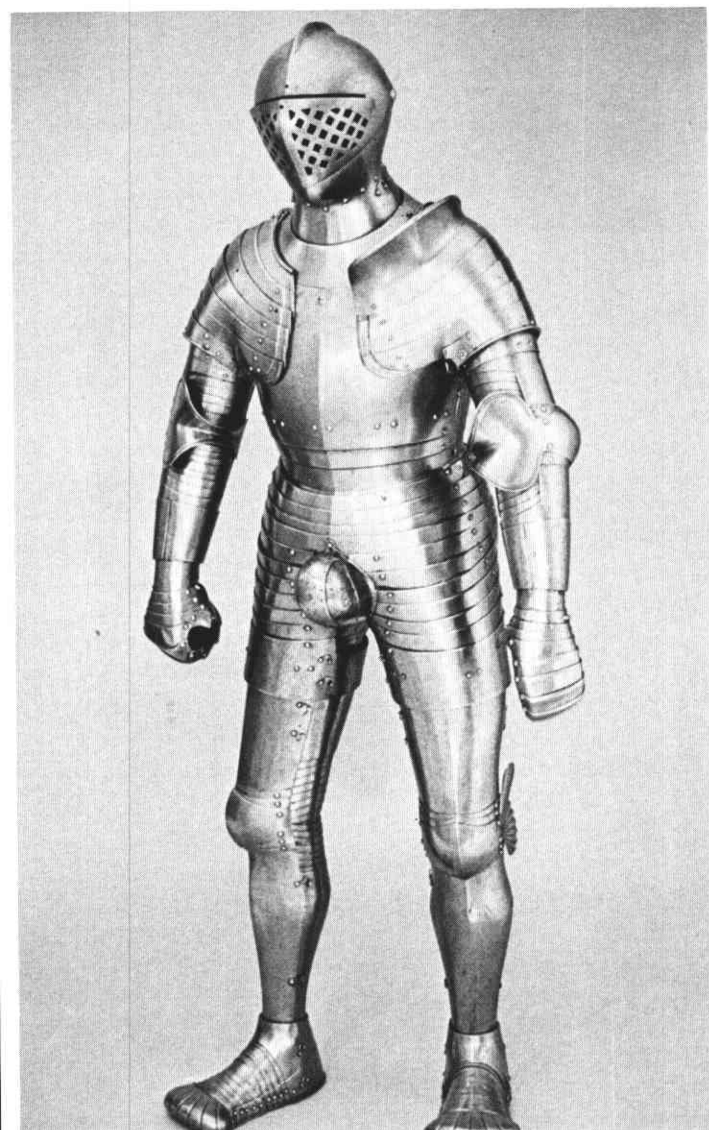
Henry VIII's "tonlet" armour for the foot-tournament, composed of contemporary pieces, decorated *en suite*, probably in 1520.

from different sources. It was almost certainly produced at short notice to meet an unexpected change in the armour to be used for the foot tournaments at the famous meeting in 1520 between Henry and Francis I of France known as the Field of Cloth of Gold. The change was at the French King's request, and it is probable that it caused Henry to abandon another foot-combat armour, which still remains at the Tower in a slightly unfinished state. This was made in the Almain Armoury at Greenwich and is a technical *tour-de force* that covers every part of the body, except the soles of the feet and palms of the hands, with articulated steel plates.

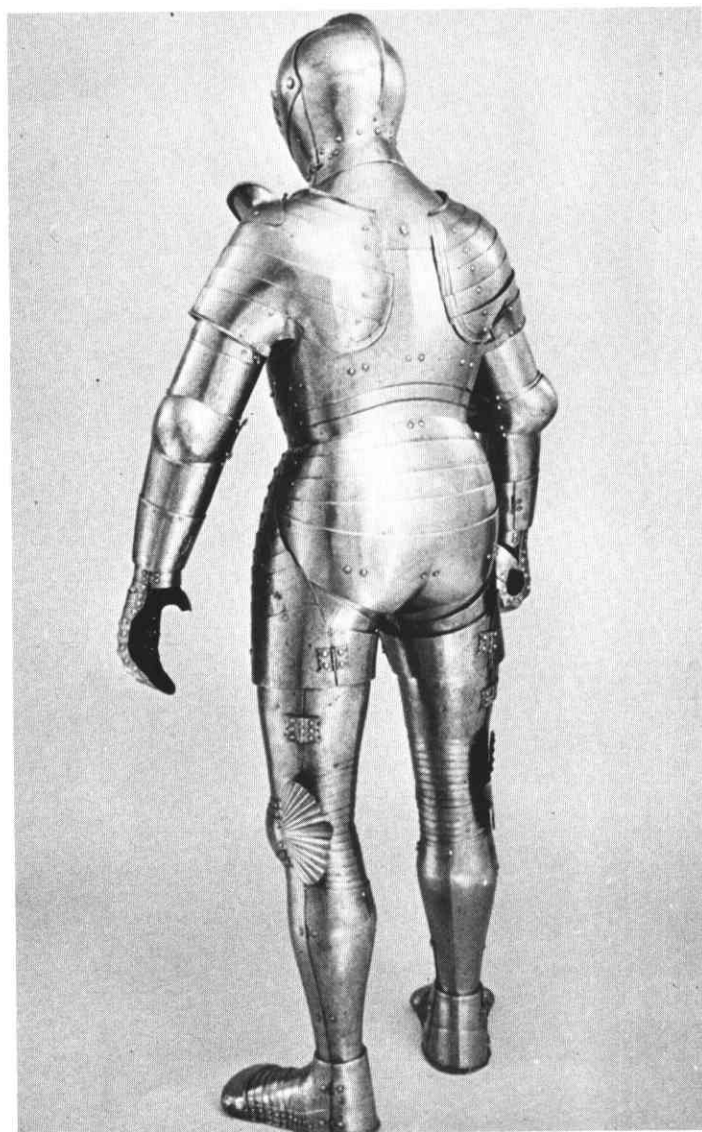
When we look at these armours we are seeing Henry more-or-less as his contemporaries saw him, and I suggest that no other objects from the past can give such a three-dimensional view of a historical personage. They confirm the evidence of contemporary observers that at the time when they are made, when the King was in his twenties, he was slim and athletic, and some 6 ft. 1 in. tall. The next surviving armour is dated 1540, his fiftieth year, and shows the corpulent figure so familiar with Holbein's famous portrait of him: the external waist measurement of the cuirass is 50 in. Made in Henry's Almain Armoury at Greenwich, it is an elaborate set for the field and tournament, with etched and gilt borders derived from designs by Hans Holbein, who also, of course, worked in England.

Of Henry's many personal arms listed in his inventories, only a dagger-blade and two carbine-like guns survive at the Tower. The guns, now lacking their locks, which must have been wheel-locks, are both breech-loaders, operating on the principle that is more familiar from the 19th-century Snider rifle: a hinged trap in the breech is opened for the insertion of cartridges, which, on these examples, took the form of reloadable steel chambers. Both are obviously contemporary, and one bears the date 1537, together with the royal monogram and a maker's mark which is probably that of William Hunt of London.

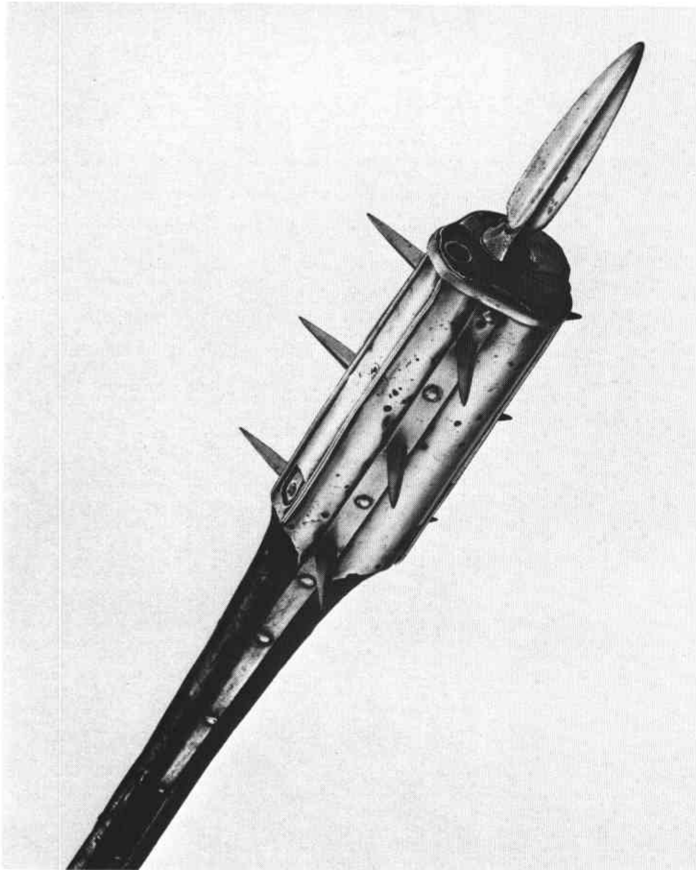
A tall spiked club containing three hand-ignited gun-barrels in its head has been known since the late 17th



Henry VIII's armour for foot-tournament, made in the Almain Armoury, Greenwich, probably in 1520.



Rear view of the foot armour.



Spiked club with three gun barrels in the head, known as Henry VIII's walking-staff, ca. 1540.

Gun shield, probably by Giovanbattista of Ravenna, 1544.

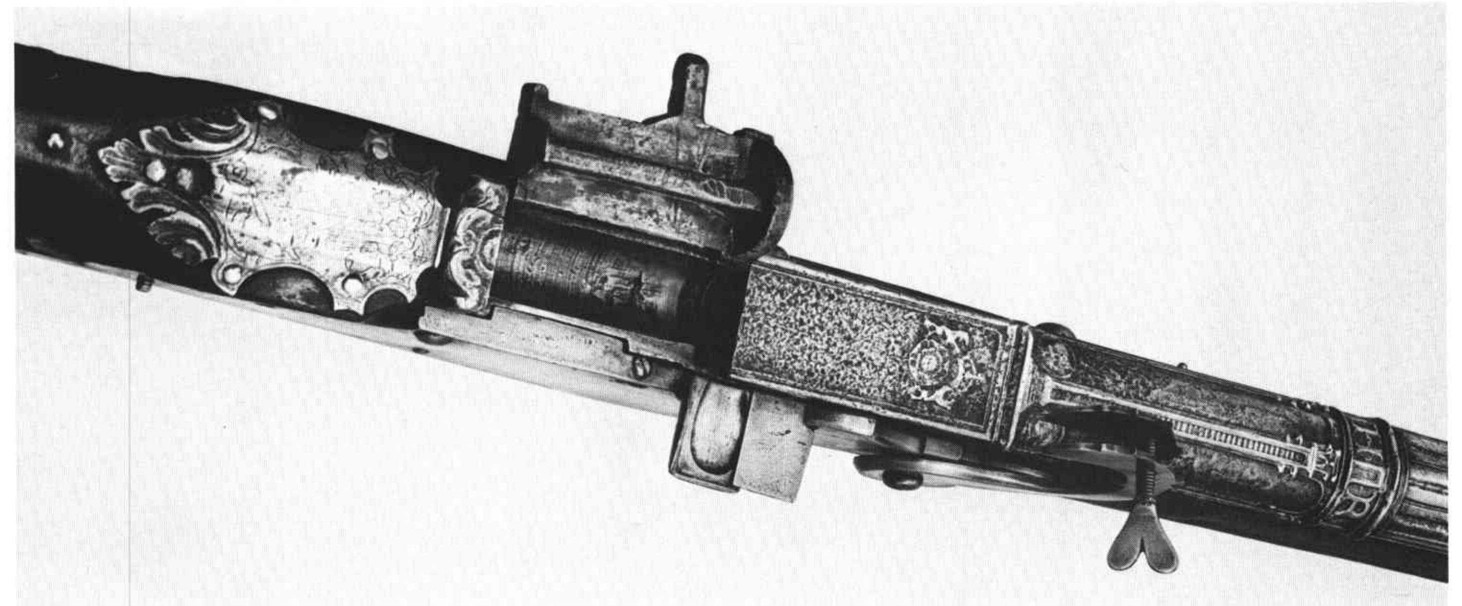
century as King Henry VIII's walking-staff. There is no evidence to suggest that it was one of the King's personal arms, though there can be little doubt that is the "Holy water sprinkler with three guns in the Top" (spelling modernised) mentioned in the 1547 inventory of his armour. Also mentioned in the same inventory are some eighty targets — that is, circular shields — described as being "with guns," and a number of these still survive at the Tower. Each contains a breech-loading matchlock pistol, and some bear Italianate painting of good quality. They were probably produced by Giovanbattista of Ravenna in Italy who, in 1544, wrote to Henry offering him such shields and similar devices. Interestingly, the remains of six decorated specimens were found in the *Mary Rose,* the royal ship sunk off Southampton in 1545.

Henry's short-lived son, Edward VI (reigned 1547–53), has left no identifiable personal traces in the Armouries. He was succeeded by two women, of whom one, Elizabeth I, survived until 1603, so for effectively the whole of the second half of the 16th century, the reigning monarch was not an armour-wearer. The Almain Armoury at Greenwich nevertheless remained in operation: indeed, it entered its best-known period, which is the one covered by the famous album of drawings of armours made there between 1558 and c. 1587, associated with Jacob Halder, the Master Workman from 1576 to 1608, and now in the Victoria & Albert Museum. A number of armours and portions of armour made at Greenwich for Elizabethan courtiers survive at the Tower, the best known probably being that of Elizabeth's favourite, and alleged lover, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, which was almost certainly made in 1575.

Elizabeth's successor, James I of England and VI of Scotland was notoriously unwarlike, and neither arms nor armour belonging to him are known to survive at the Tower. The next identifiable royal pieces belonged to his sons, King Charles I and his elder brother, Henry, Prince of Wales, who died at the age of 18 in 1612. They are represented by three childrens' armours: a plain, and now incomplete, Greenwich suit, and two richly decorated Dutch ones, but it is, as yet, not absolutely certain which belonged to which prince. Charles was no more warlike than his father — though most certainly not a coward — and does not seem to have been much of a patron of his Almain armourers: the one adult armour associated with him, a splendid gilt and engraved cuirassier suit, is Dutch. One other piece surviving from his reign, is a suit of ca. 1635 measuring some 35 in. high, excluding dragon crest, which perhaps belonged to the royal midget, Jeffrey Hudson, whose height, it is said, did not exceed eighteen inches until after he was thirty.

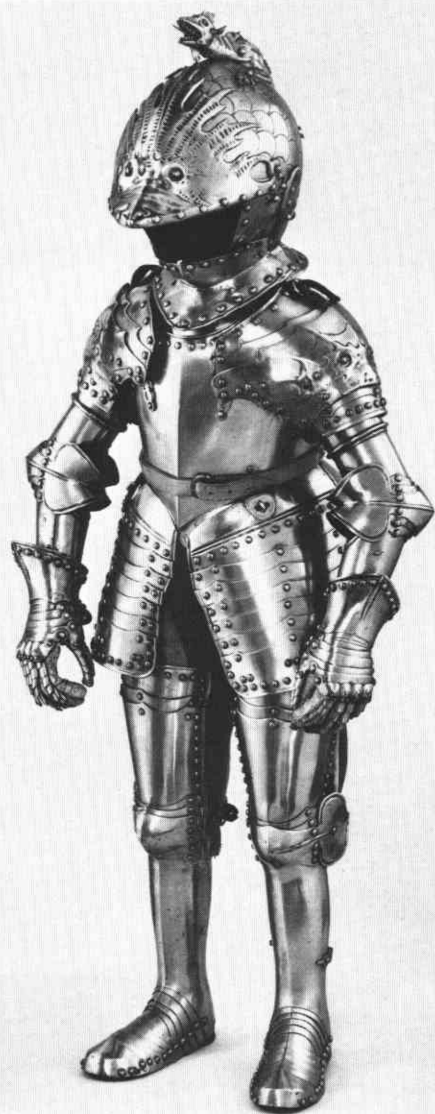
Charles I's son, Charles II, is likewise represented by a miniature armour, worn by him as a young boy, and apparently of English origin. It is a model of the contemporary light-horseman's "harquebus" armour, and now comprizes only a cuirass and open helmet with a gorget to be worn separately, but is decorated all over with punched ornament and silvered.

With the restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660 we are back to the reorganisation of the Tower Armouries, of



A breech-loading matchlock gun of ca. 1537, attributed to King Henry VIII.

Partly gilt and chased armour for a child, probably made for Henry, Prince of Wales. Dutch, early-17th century.



Miniature armour, perhaps made for Jeffery Hudson, the royal midget, c. 1635-40.

Silver and engraved harquebus armour made for Charles II as a child, English ca. 1635.

Experimental Forsyth lock mounted in a Baker cavalry carbine, ca. 1807, and other Forsyth pieces.

which I have already spoken, that was the real beginning of their conversion into the modern museum that they now are. There was to be only one more royal armour to come into the collection and survive until the present day. Made for Charles's younger brother, who succeeded him as King James II in 1685, it is another elaborate version of an harquebus armour: the kind of equipment made familiar from countless illustrations of Oliver Cromwell's "Ironsides" or, in the United States, of the 17th century colonists. It consists merely of a breast and backplate, each bearing a proof-bullet mark, and elbow-gauntlet and an open, peaked pot which, instead of the normal triple-barred face-defence, has a plate pierced and engraved with the royal coat-of-arms and the King's initials. The whole armour is decorated with bands of gilt engraving and, for its period, is of fine quality. It is of special interest, not only as the last armour intended for serious use known to have been made for a British king, but also as the last armour of quality known to have been made in Britain. Its author was Richard Hoden of London who was paid £100 for it in 1686.

As I have already mentioned, the Armouries' main business of acting as an arsenal and manufactory continued throughout the 18th century, and many of the most interesting historical pieces in the collection are a product of this. They include experimental and sealed patterns of arms produced for the Ordnance Office, which from the 15th century had gradually assumed control of national arms production, and also of the Tower, as well as hundreds of Brown Bess muskets and other service arms. Perhaps the most famous of the experimenters was the Rev. Alexander Forsyth, inventor of the percussion-system, who in 1806 and 1807 worked on his invention in the Tower at the invitation of the Master General of the Ordnance, the Earl of Moira. Every gun collector knows the story of his ejection — allegedly with the injunction to take "all his rubbish" with him — by Moira's successor, Lord Chatham. Some of this rubbish has been returned to the Armouries by Forsyth's descendants and is now exhibited there: also, on the left of the steps going up from the Bloody Tower to Tower Green, is a bronze tablet commemorating him, erected as a kind of belated apology in 1930.

Though the Armouries were mainly an active modern arsenal at the period under discussion, the historical collections were regarded as being of sufficient importance for an "ancient" armourer to be appointed in the first half of the 18th century to care for it. There seem also to have been occasional attempts to make the display more interesting to the public, one instance of which was the setting up, apparently in 1774, of an entirely bogus tableau representing Queen Elizabeth I on the occasion of her famous speech at Tilbury before the engagement with the Spanish Armada in 1588. The costume and armour worn by her figure was claimed to be original, but the former was brand new in 1774, and the latter included part of the skirt of her father's tonlet armour — which I have already mentioned — no doubt because it was thought to be appropriate to a woman! Parties were taken round by the yeomen warders (beefeaters) who still act as guides to some parts of the Tower,

Experimental and completed models of the quick-firing revolving gun patented by James Buckle in 1718.

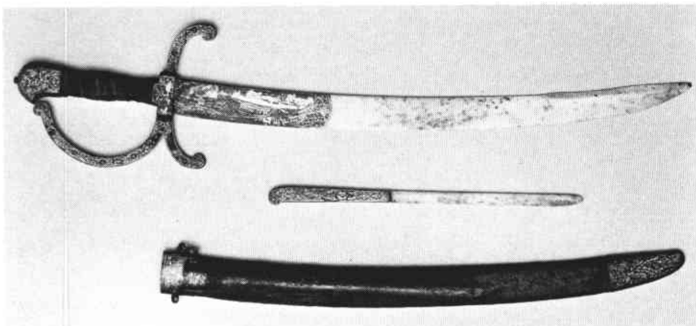
A group of sea-service flintlock muskets. From top to bottom, ca. 1743-5, ca. 1780, ca. 1820.

and they had a fund of inaccurate and lurid stories, which must have been a great deal more entertaining than sober historical truth. The whole thing seems to have been operated at the level of the lowest kind of fairground raree-show, and there was even an armour with a codpiece that squirted a jet of water when the beefeater pressed a foot-pump! One pained provincial wrote in 1785, after a visit to the Tower, "What should be great they turn to farce."

By the time that this was written the public attitudes that were to bring about a radical change had already started to develop. The cause was the growth amongst a small group of people of an interest in the art and antiquities of the Middle Ages. In 1786 Francis Grose published his *Treatise on Ancient Armour,* the first attempt at a serious historical study of the subject, and in 1824 appeared the first edition of Dr. (later Sir) Samuel Rush Meyrick's great *Critical Inquiry into Ancient Armour* which, despite many faults, provided the foundation for all subsequent studies. It contained criticisms of the Tower display, and the ultimate result was that in 1826 Meyrick was invited to reorganise part of it, including the Line of Kings. He was made to retain this last — it was obviously very popular — but he was able to alter it so that it fitted in, archaeologically speaking, with the armours that were available. By this date, anyway, with the beginning of attitudes now usually labelled Victorian, people were becoming more serious about historical matters and about the education of the public at large. A senior official in the Ordnance Office at the Tower, Robert Porrett, who is one of the unsung heroes of the Armouries, cared very much about all these things, and was able to persuade the Board that the collection should be made into a serious historical one, and improved by the purchase of pieces of a kind not already represented. Not only did they agree to this in 1825, but they also agreed to devote the proceeds of the public admission charge to the Tower to this purpose, an arrangement that the present Master of the Armouries would, I am sure, be delighted to revive.

The "Lion" armour, Franco-Italian, c. 1540.

As I have already mentioned, the historical part of the Armouries had hitherto increased as the result of the natural process of obsolescence in the contemporary part. Added to this were pieces acquired as booty or trophies — for example, Scottish arms captured during the risings of 1715 and 1745 — and one magnificent acquisition made under rather curious circumstances. This is the so-called "Lion Armour," an embossed and gold-damscened suit of ca. 1540 and Franco-Italian origin, the equal if not the superior of the similarly-embossed armour of King Henry II of France, which was recently sold from Hever Castle for over £2,000,000. This was lent to the Armouries by the then ancient armourer, John Cooper, in 1768, when a need arose, after the death of King George II, for another armour to add to the Line of Kings. When his son's widow tried to claim it back in 1821 she was unable to produce an official receipt and so was turned down by no less a person than the great Duke of Wellington, then Master General of the Ordnance, on the grounds that "Property which is deemed to appertain to the Crown cannot be given up excepting upon Clear proof



King Henry VIII's hunting-sword (woodknife) by Diego De Caias, 1544.

that it belongs to the Individual claiming it," so it still remains in the Armouries!

From 1825, with the implementing of the new policy of making the collection more representative, many pieces were acquired, a few by donation, but mostly through purchases in the sale-rooms or from dealers, amongst whom the unscrupulous Samuel Pratt, progenitor of many fakes, was pre-eminent. The policy was, on the whole, a good one, and important acquisitions were made, but, since no proper records of purchases have survived, it did have the effect of making it more difficult for modern scholars to identify the contents of the old armoury. The purchase-policy does not seem to have survived the abolition of the Board of Ordnance in 1855, and the transfer of its functions, including responsibility for the Tower, to the War Office.

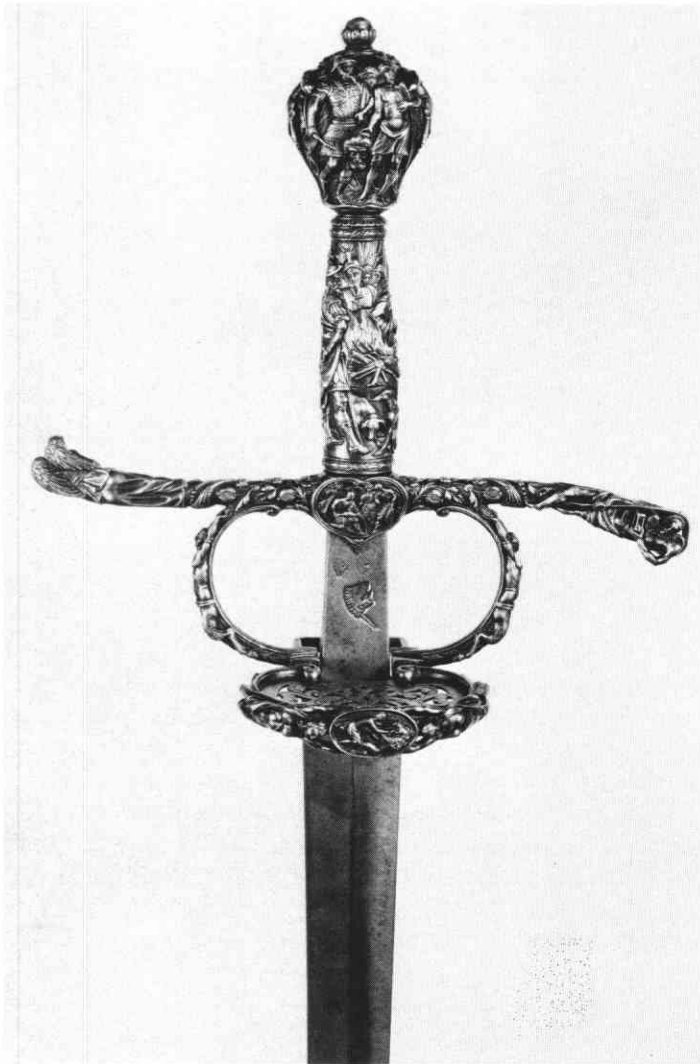
By 1855, the showplace aspects of the Armouries had begun to predominate, though, as I have already mentioned. arms for current use were kept there until 1915. Despite this, because they remained a military establishment, they gained no benefit from the great 19th-century expansion of museums that produced so many of the institutions, like the Victoria & Albert and Metropolitan Museums, that are now famous. They remained under the sole charge of Army Storekeepers, who had no historical knowledge whatsoever, until 1892, when, because their state had become a scandal, the post of Curator of the Armouries was created. The first holder of the post was Viscount Dillon, who was not only a distinguished antiquary and authority on arms and armour, but also a member of the aristocracy and of independent means. He, with generosity, but a certain lack of far-sightedness, undertook to do the work for an honorarium so small that it cannot even have covered his traveling expenses to and from the Tower. He was provided with no subordinate curatorial staff nor other assistance of any kind, not even secretarial assistance. Surprising though it may seem, this scandalous state of affairs was allowed to continue until shortly after 1945 under the Office of Works, later Ministry of Works, an ancestor of the present Department of the Environment which assumed responsibility for the Armouries in 1904, along with other historic parts of the Tower. So far as I can discover, no purchases were made for the collection — apart from a Scottish pistol bought in 1898 — between 1855 and 1939, though Dillon's successor as Curator of the Armouries in 1913, C.J. ffoulkes, made a number of acquisitions through gifts, long-term loans and transfers from other institutions. Amongst the loans, special reference must be made to the two examples of the revolver gun patented by James Puckle in 1718, one an iron experimental prototype and the other a finished product in brass, which ffoulkes discovered in 1934. This, as you probably know, superficially resembles a machine-gun, but is actually a quick-firer constructed to fire "round bullets against Christians and square bullets against Turks:" cylinders chambered for both types of projectile are preserved with the guns. Of transfers from other institutions, the most important that took place under ffoulkes's *regime* was that of a major collection of early armour and weapons from the Rotunda Museum, Woolwich. ffoulkes's other contribution, if it can be regarded as such, was to bring about the revival in 1935 of the old title of Master of the Armouries, which had lapsed in the late 17th century.

In 1939 the late Sir James Mann succeeded ffoulkes as Master of the Armouries, and they were thus, for the first time in their long history, placed under the charge of someone who was not only an acknowledged authority on the history of arms and armour, but who had also had practical experience of museum work. But he was then full-time Director of the Wallace Collection, and so could only run the Armouries as a side-line — he normally used to go there on one afternoon a week — and he continued to work on the old terms, receiving only a small honorarium for his services. Sadly, the first six years of his period of office were heavily handicapped by World War II, during which the Armouries were closed. He was, however, able to give a foretaste of the fundamental changes he was eventually to bring about by purchasing an important English armour, made for an Earl of Pembroke, for the collection almost immediately after his appointment. Remarkably, he was also able in 1942, right in the thick of the War, to persuade the authorities to allow him to organize the purchase for the Armouries, by the National Art Collection Fund, of the entire Norton Hall collection of some 500 pieces of arms and armour of all kinds.

Like his immediate predecessors, Mann started with an Armouries staff that consisted only of a Foreman and the "Attendant Cleaners," whose job it was to patrol the display-areas during opening times, and to clean and grease the exhibits. As soon as the war in Europe ended in 1945, he began the task of providing the Armouries with the enlarged staff, supporting services and finance that they desperately needed. I will not bore you with the details: sufficient to say that he was able at once to set up a small basic professional and administrative establishment and workshop, and also get the important principle accepted that the Armouries, like any other national museum, needed to improve their collections by systematic purchase — as well as by other means — and that a regular purchase-grant was essential. From this small beginning Mann and his successors were able to develop the important modern museum that the Armouries are today. You can gain some idea of how slow and painful the process has been, and of the nature of the bureaucratic obstacles that have hindered it, when I tell you that when I joined the Armouries on 1 January, 1951, the only office typewriter and the only camera there were unofficial loans: our establishment was too small for us to be entitled *officially* to either, though we conducted an extensive correspondence and had many requests for photographs! I might mention also, that the present Master of the Armouries, Mr. A.V.B. Norman, who was appointed in 1977, is the first full-time, fully salaried modern head of the Armouries, and only at the beginning of the present month did they achieve a measure of independence from any government department by becoming a trustee museum.

As a result of the modern additions made to the old royal armoury and arsenal in the manner I have described, the Armouries have become one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of arms and armour in the world.

They are mainly concerned with a period extending from the European Middle Ages to the beginning of the 20th Century, but they have a few earlier and later pieces, and also an impressive oriental collection. Within these very wide limits they have something for everybody, and it is impossible to convey their full range in a short lecture.

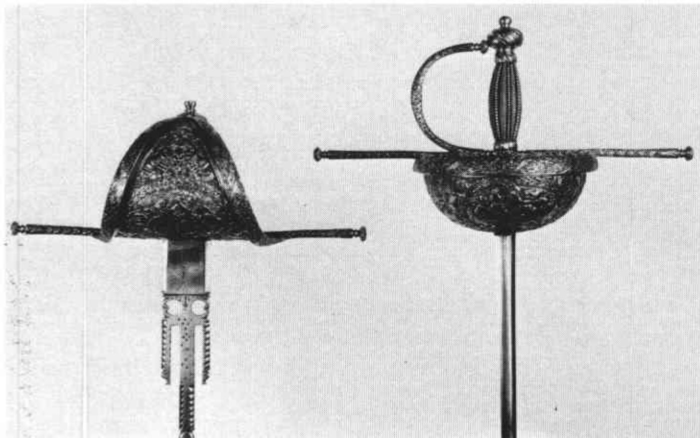


Rapier with chiselled steel hilt, said to have belonged to John Hampden, ca. 1640.

WINDSOR CASTLE

I make no apology for having spent so much of the time allotted to me today in discussing the Tower of London Armouries. They are, overall, by far the most important arms collection in the whole of Britain as well as being the only one with a significant historical structure. Linked closely to them, however, is the collection of Her Majesty The Queen at Windsor Castle, another ancient royal palace and fortress some 21 miles west of London. There was an armoury there in medieval times, and no doubt an important one, but nothing belonging to it is known to survive. The origins of the present collection go back only to the period immediately after the restoration of Charles II to the throne (1660) that also saw the reorganisation of the Tower Armouries. In 1681, the King's cousin, Prince Rupert of the Rhine, as Constable of Windsor Castle, arranged for the transfer of some rich arms and armour from the Tower to decorate the Guard Room and St. George's Hall there. It included pieces that had originally been in the old Tudor and Stuart royal armoury at Greenwich Palace, and pieces from the same source have been transferred between the two collections, in both directions, on several occasions since 1681, including quite recently. The modern transfers have been merely for the purpose of reuniting related pieces that had become separated.

The earliest royal piece at Windsor Castle, as at the Tower, is an armour made for Henry VIII: probably the last armour ever made for him. A product of his Almain Armoury at Greenwich, it is similar in design to his armour of 1540 at the Tower, but must have been made some four or five years later — perhaps for Henry's use at the siege of Boulogne in 1544 — since it is much bigger. It has also been enlarged by inserting extension-plates at the sides, so that the external waist-measurement is now some 54 in., while the thigh-defences have been cut back, presumably to make them fit. It provides vivid practical evidence of Henry's expanding dimensions in his last years (he died in 1547)!



Spanish cup hilt rapier and companion dagger, said to have belonged to King Philip IV, ca. 1650.

Another piece that belonged to Henry was only reacquired for the royal collection in modern times. This is a curved hunting-sword or woodknife, damascened in gold with a representation of the siege of Boulogne (1544) and a Latin elegiac inscription refering to it. The decoration is so like that on pieces signed by the Spaniard Diego de Caias, who is known to have been working for Henry at the time in England, that there can be no doubt that he was responsible for it.

The Tudor Court is also represented by a magnificent etched and gilt armour made in 1585 in the Greenwich workshop for Sir Christopher Hatton, Queen Elizabeth I's Lord Chancellor. This also escaped from the royal armoury at an