Factsheet

International links for Henry VIII: Dressed to Kill

France
• The exhibition includes loans from the Musee de l’Armee, Paris. Perhaps it is a little ironic that the national collection of France now includes items that Henry had bought for his English guards, eg a pollaxe and buckler. For about a quarter of Henry’s reign England was at war with France
• Paris has also loaned the ‘Fleuranges armour’ which was made at Greenwich and is thought to have been a gift from Henry VIII to Fleuranges, one of his opponents at the 1520 tournament called the Field of Cloth of Gold
• Henry visited France on several occasions and the second visit, the Field of the Cloth of Gold, features heavily in the exhibition
• 1513: Henry was leading the English against France in war, and he always took great pride in the victory at Bomy, commonly called the ‘battle of the Spurs’ because the French knights turned and fled. Henry’s troops captured the towns of Therouanne and Tournai, but the campaign proved expensive
• 1520: the Field of the Cloth of Gold super-tournament – this diplomatic and sporting event took place on the exact boundary between what was then England and France between Guisnes and Ardres in Northern France (England then held the area of France around Calais). Henry’s Foot Combat and Tonlet armours were both made in London for the Field of the Cloth of Gold. Only the latter was taken & used, because the changed rules of the competition disqualified the former! After the end of the event, the two kings said farewell to each other; then Henry VIII went to hold talks with Emperor Charles V, France’s enemy, at Gravelines and Calais
• 1532: Henry went to meet Francis half way between Calais (English) and Boulogne (France). This time Henry left Katherine of Aragon behind, but not as his regent. He was hoping for France’s support in getting the Pope to annul this marriage. Instead, Henry took Anne Boleyn, recently created Marquis of Pembroke, whom Henry was eager to marry (he did so secretly in January 1533)
1544: finally, despite his large size and ill health, Henry VII insisted in going to lead the English army in person, as a matter of honour. He spent a vast sum of money on this war with France and is said to have enjoyed watching his artillery bombarding the walls of Boulogne, which the English captured. It is thought that the Wilton anime armour (on loan to this exhibition) was one of the armours Henry used during this campaign.

In 1545 a French fleet threatened an invasion of England. When the English warships went to attack them, Henry VIII watched in horror as his warship the Mary Rose sank off Portsmouth. Many objects recovered from the wreck have been loaned to the exhibition, as well as an engraving showing the event.

Henry VIII and Francis I of France were rivals, and alternately friends and then enemies.

Henry was King of England but also claimed to be King of France. The French symbol, the fleur-de-lys, was used to decorate some of Henry’s arms & armour.

At the Field of Cloth of Gold, where they were not meant to compete against each other, Henry & Francis had an impromptu wrestling match. Francis is said to have thrown Henry, then refused Henry’s request for a re-match!

They were almost exact contemporaries: they came to the throne within a few years of each other (Henry 1509, Francis 1515) and died within three months of each other in 1547.

Germany

Like premiership football club owners today, Henry spent a fortune assembling the best ‘team’ of master armourers from across Europe. They travelled far and wide to work for wealthy monarchs. Many came from Germany to work for Henry they were known in England as ‘Almains’ (cf Allemagne). However, not all of them chose to remain in England; some (eg Wolfgang Grosschedel) left Henry’s workshop and went back to Germany.

Germany cities like Nuremberg were important centres of armour manufacture. Henry ordered many suits of relatively inexpensive armour for his infantry troops, and these armours were called ‘Almain Rivet’ because of their country of origin. An example is included in the exhibition, representing the flourishing arms trade in 16th century Europe.
• Henry employed as his court painter Hans Holbein the Younger, who had been born in Augsburg. Holbein was the best portraitist to paint in England; the exhibition features a late 16th century portrait of Henry after an original by Holbein. Several of Henry’s armours and saddle steels in this exhibition feature decoration designed by Holbein.

Belgium
• Flanders, as the area was known, was a leading centre for armour production within the Hapsburg empire.
• Some of the finest armours from the early part of Henry’s reign, such as the Burgundian bard, were made or decorated for him in Brussels by skilled craftsmen like Guillem Margot, Martin van Royne and Paul van Vrelant.
• So good was their work that van Vrelant came to work for Henry in England as a armour decorator, while van Royne became the head of Henry’s royal armour workshop at Greenwich.

Austria
• In 1513 Henry VIII and Maximilian I were allies in a war against France.
• The ‘Horned Helmet’, and the lost armour that once accompanied it, were a gift to Henry from the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, and were made in his Imperial armour workshop in Innsbruck. They were superior to anything that Henry could have made in England at that time.
• The master of the Imperial workshop was Konrad Seusenhofer, who is believed to have been responsible for making several of the finest pieces of armour on show in Dressed to Kill.
• Seusenhofer’s works include the armour of the future Charles V (loaned from the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) was made as a gift from Emperor Maximilian to his young grandson, who succeeded him as Emperor in 1519. Henry met the young Charles in 1513 when they were on campaign against France.
• In 1520 Charles V visited Henry VIII in England and they met again shortly after the Field of Cloth of Gold in northern France. Charles wanted England as an ally in a new war against France.
• However, Charles was a nephew of Henry’s first wife, Katherine of Aragon. When Henry wanted to divorce Katherine (or have their marriage annulled), Charles opposed him and supported his aunt

USA
• On loan from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York is the Wilton anime armour, believed to have been made for Henry VIII in about 1544, when he went to war against France for the last time
• This is a very remarkable armour that has an unusual, laminated breastplate called an anime, unlike Henry’s other armours
• The armour is thought to have been made in northern Italy and it is finely decorated. By the time this armour was delivered, Henry VIII was already seriously overweight and ill
• Soon after Henry’s death in 1547 this armour entered the armoury of the Earl of Pembroke, at Wilton near Salisbury. In the early 20th century it was sold and in 1932 it was acquired by the Metropolitan

Italy
• Milan was a very important centre of armourers. One of the most important family businesses specialising in high-quality armour was that of the Missaglias. Dressed to Kill features a superb great bacinet that bears the Missaglia mark. This helmet was used as part of the Tonlet armour, assembled for Henry VIII to wear at the Field of Cloth of Gold in 1520
• As part of his plan to establish a first-rate armoury in England, Henry VIII invited five armourers from northern Italy to London in 1511. It has not proved possible to identify their work conclusively yet amongst Henry’s early armours
• Dressed to Kill includes the elegant ‘Italian Bard’, a horse armour made in England for Henry VIII. Named because of its decoration in the Italianate style, this may have been the work of armourers from Italy, or craftsmen from elsewhere who had learned how to make use of motifs originating in Italy
• Italy played a very important part in the arms industry of the early 16th century. Henry VIII ordered many essential items for his troops from Italian arms traders, including staff weapons and longbow staves of yew wood (represented in Dressed to Kill)
• Henry also probably bought a consignment of experimental gun shields from an Italian merchant in about 1540 (several featured in Dressed to Kill) and excavations on the wreck of the Mary Rose indicate that these were carried by some of Henry’s marines in 1545 when fighting the French
• Henry VIII’s last armour, the Wilton anime, was probably made for him in northern Italy. It was possibly worn when Henry was on campaign against the French at Boulogne in 1544. It is unclear why this fine armour (loaned from New York) was imported, whereas Henry’s other armours from the latter part of his reign were made by his own workshop at Greenwich

Spain
• In 1509 Henry VIII married Katherine of Aragon, daughter of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, who had briefly married his older brother Arthur who died in 1502
• Not long after their marriage, Henry’s armourers celebrated the royal marriage with Hs & Ks linked by true lover’s knots on the ‘Silvered and Engraved’ armour
• Katherine used the pomegranate and the sheaf of arrows of Aragon as two of her symbols; these appear on several of Henry’s objects in the exhibition, such as the ‘Burgundian Bard’ and ‘Silvered and Engraved’
• As a symbol of Castile, Katherine also used the castle, which also appears on Henry’s armour such as the ‘Silvered and Engraved’
• In 1512, Ferdinand and Henry (father-in-law and son-in-law) were allies against France. Soon Ferdinand let Henry down and relations turned sour

Scotland
• While Henry was away in France in 1513, his wife Katherine of Aragon ruled in his place in England. The English won a great victory over the Scottish army at the battle of Flodden Field
• At Flodden the English army killed King James IV of Scotland, who was Henry’s brother-in-law (married to his elder sister, Margaret)
• Afterwards, Margaret left Scotland and came to stay with her brother in England. Amongst the entertainment that Henry put on for his sister was a
tournament at Greenwich in 1516: Dressed to Kill includes the score cheque from this event. Margaret returned to Scotland in 1517

- In the last years of Henry’s reign there was more fighting between the Scots and the English. Henry was angry that the King of Scotland, James V (and Henry’s nephew) ignored an invitation to meet at York in 1541. The English and Scottish armies clashed at the battle of Solway Moss in 1542 and the Scots were routed. James V died three weeks later, leaving his infant daughter – Mary Queen of Scots - to succeed him. During several years of hostility the English launched several attacks, including one when parts of Edinburgh were destroyed
- On loan from Stirling is the oldest surviving football in the world, thought to date from the mid sixteenth century. Amongst many sports, Henry is believed to have tried football: his archive records that he bought a pair of football boots