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Battle and Bloodshed

*They fought until they both did sweat,
With swords of tempered steel,
Until the blood, like drops of rain,
They, trickling down, did feel.*

Hotspur takes on the Earl of Douglas, from the
Border ballad *The Ballad of Chevy Chase*

Arms and armour are not simply historical curios or ornaments to grace the walls of stately homes. Each type serves to tell Europe's story as one of centuries drenched in bloodshed. Burrell would have been aware of this history, which is vividly evoked in his collection of Border ballads, novels and poems. The medieval and Renaissance era was one of Burrell's main interests; most of the arms and armour that he collected was from this period.

Spears, swords, pollaxes, maces and daggers are particularly well represented in the collection. Such weapons could be used in combination or in succession. Once a warrior had shattered his lance or spear, he would resort to his sword or mace. A letter written in 1586 by an English commander describes weapons used in this way, when the first of his soldiers attacked a fort: 'so did he alone maintain the fight, first with his pike [long spear], then with the stumps of his pike, and afterward his sword, against at the least nine or

ten, and every man either broke his pike upon his breast, or hit him with the shot of their musket, yet would he not back a foot.'

Burrell purchased two complete armours of the type borne by heavy and light cavalymen of the sixteenth century – the skilled horsemen deployed in the massive armies of kings, city states, emperors and popes in the seemingly endless conflicts of that period. These armours were composite already by the time they came into Burrell's possession, meaning that some of the components were taken from other armours of similar date or are later replacements, as was a common practice amongst collectors and dealers. Most of the armour parts are of excellent quality, some outstanding.

It was not only on the battlefield where blood was shed. Many civilians – even churchmen – had swords slung at the hip, ready to be drawn at the slightest insult, and daggers were carried by most people. Fatal fights were common, so too was murder. Burrell had accounts of the brutal stabbings of King James I (1394–1437) and of David Rizzio (1533–66), the beloved secretary of Mary, Queen of Scots (1542–87). The flashing steel of the rapier, as wielded in the duels described by Walter Scott in *Pevekil of the Peak*, could take a life in a heartbeat.

Opposite: By the time this arming sword was made in the early 1200s, the weapon was of a type very widely used across Europe. There are two encircled crosses on this sword's blade. The owner would have believed these to offer divine protection – but not to whoever they struck with it. Arming sword (detail; p. 20).

Basket-hilted broadsword, about 1610

Hilt made in England, blade made by Clemens Willems in Solingen, Germany

Steel, iron wire, silver

102.5 x 12.2 x 11.8 cm; 1.090 kg

2.92

Swords can be objects of exquisite beauty as well as devastatingly effective killing tools. Two decorative techniques have been employed on this sword's hilt. The metal has been chased – carefully shaped on the outer surface with chisels – then blackened. The shapes left to protrude in relief have been encrusted with silver. This process uses more precious metal than standard silver gilding, making the piece more expensive to produce. Through these techniques the scrolling foliage, and even a little face, vividly stand out against the blackened background.

The blade was crafted in Solingen where very high-quality steel blades were made – and still are made today.



Swept-hilt rapier, 1550–1600

Possibly made in Italy

Steel, iron wire

112 x 19.7 x 15.6 cm; 1.486 kg

2.130

There is intricate chased decoration across most of the components of this sword's hilt. On two central ovoid cartouches and around the pommel's circumference fierce battles rage, in miniature. The owner of such a fine weapon would almost certainly have received a sound education in the great military campaigns of the ancient world, such as those of Julius Caesar (100–44 BC). He would, therefore, have understood the meaning of these stylized warriors fighting it out on foot and on horseback. Their presence would serve as a constant visual reminder to him of the enduring qualities of bravery, loyalty and military prudence.





Armed for Tournaments

Tournaments originated in the medieval period. At their heart they were organized combats, usually on horseback, between men of the warrior elite such as knights. Tournaments were hosted by wealthy people, often at celebrations such as weddings, royal visits and the conclusion of peace treaties.

Each tournament was unique. Strict regulations were established in the prearranged rules, which governed: the social status of those permitted to take part; the types of combat – mounted or on foot, with barriers separating the combatants or without; the types of armour, weapons and horse tack used. These would be thoroughly inspected by the appointed judges. Tournaments could be dangerous affairs. To reduce the participants' risk of injury or death, craftsmen developed specialized armour of increasingly complex design. The Burrell Collection has objects that give us some understanding of the combat types and the specialized equipment made for them.



Opposite: On this armour for a tournament, the substantial reinforcing plate on the shoulder and the markedly protruding lower visor offer excellent protection from incoming lance and sword strikes. Half-armour (detail; pp. 56–57).

One of the most popular tournament forms was the joust, a mounted combat with lances. To win, a competitor must break their lance on an opponent, causing the solid wooden shaft to shatter with as much force as though the lancehead had fatally penetrated their flesh. It is for this reason that the target area was the upper body and – best of all – the head. An English nobleman's rules of 1466 decree that he who hits 'three times in the sight of the helm shall have the prize.' In the late sixteenth century, jousting authority Luis Zapata de Chaves advised that a helmet's visor should be 'secure and small and fitted close to the eyes so that everything there is can be seen when looking through it. And may God protect you from the danger of a splinter entering, for if it does, it goes without saying that in order to be fatal it only needs to enter one digit less or one more.' Such dangers were all too real. In 1559 King Henry II of France (1519–59) was struck by his opponent's lance, causing several splinters to penetrate his eye socket. He died 11 days later.

Left: Here, the jousting on the left has struck a successful blow on his opponent's helm, the strength of which has forced back his head. *Attack on the Castle of Love* (detail), an elephant-ivory mirror case depicting a joust, about 1340, made in Paris. Burrell Collection, 21.10.

Right: This panel shows a large reinforcing plate over the front of a helm, secured by a strap and buckle – a safety feature introduced for jousting in the 1300s. Stained-glass panel featuring a helm and crest (detail), about 1400, made in Lower Saxony, Germany. Burrell Collection, 45.486.1.b.





Pair of rowel spurs, about 1400

Probably made in the Kingdom of Bohemia,
now the Czech Republic

Copper alloy, gold

Left spur (above) 7.5 x 18 x 6.2 cm; 162 g

Right spur (below) 7.5 x 17.8 x 6.6 cm; 159 g

2.22, 2.23

Very few surviving pairs match the finery of these rowel spurs. In correspondence with Burrell, expert Charles Relly Beard lauded these as 'tip top' and 'the best pair I know.' The spurrier (spur-maker) has crafted a knobby textured surface and smooth, sharp rowel-tips to cleverly recreate in metal the feet and cockspurs of the fierce fighting cock.

The rowel – from the medieval French word 'rouel', meaning small wheel – is the spiked component. It

can rotate so as not to pierce too far into a horse's flanks. This type had superseded the simpler prick spur by the 1300s. Spurs were often made of iron or steel with a non-ferrous coating to prevent the horse's warm, salty blood and sweat from corroding them – tin or copper-alloy for commoners, silver for squires and gold for knights.

Gilt spurs were buckled on as a key part of the medieval knighting ceremony. The origins of knighthood are grounded in the expert skills of the elite mounted warrior. Sir Ramon Llull (about 1232–about 1315/16), in his book on chivalry, explains that 'spurs are given to the knight to signify the diligence, expertise and zeal with which he professes the honour of his Order.'



The tapestry-makers have here reimagined the Old Testament patriarch Abraham as a fourteenth-century knight complete with his gilt rowel spurs. *Scenes from the Seven Sacraments: Communion, and Melchizedek Offering Bread and Wine to Abraham* (detail), about 1440, probably made in the Southern Netherlands, now Belgium. Burrell Collection, 46.119.



Pistol, dated 1649
 Made in Scotland
 Steel, brass
 13.5 x 5.8 x 5.4 cm; 1.217 kg
 2.125

Most Scottish pistols were made by craftsmen in Lowland burghs and towns. In 1575 an English agent reported that these 'artificers are skilful' and could provide pistols for 'the most part of the gentlemen and horsemen of the realm.' Scottish pistols are of a unique design: they have a hollow, all-metal construction formed from plates braised together; spherical triggers with no trigger-guard looping beneath; and matching touch-hole prickers which unscrew from the middle of the butt's end.

Pistols were usually made in pairs to be drawn with both hands. This one is for the left, as the lock – the ignition mechanism, in this case a flintlock – is always on the outside of a pistol when drawn. Parts

of the lock are engraved with a delicate design of foliage and flowerheads. The words 'Bon Accord' are incised on the barrel. This is the motto of Aberdeen, but the maker of the pistol is unknown.

Fine pistols such as this were sold to Highlanders who would carry them hooked on their belts. An English spy in Edinburgh, Daniel Defoe (1660–1731), did not understand the high status of the Highlanders he saw there – a status openly displayed by the quality of their weapons. He asserted that it was 'ridiculous to see a man in his mountain habit, armed with a broadsword, targe, pistol or perhaps two in his girdle ... walking down the street as upright and haughty as if he were a lord.'

