

Creative Approaches to the Historical Collections of the Royal Armouries Museum, Leeds



[OBJECTIVES]

This project explores creative approaches to the Royal Armouries Museum historical collections, centering medieval gauntlets as both material objects and carriers of symbolic meaning. It aims to make obscure objects in the collection more accessible to non-academic audiences, especially younger visitors, while retaining historical depth and accuracy.

[RESEARCH QUESTIONS]

How did gauntlet styles evolve across the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries and what technical, tactical, and social factors drove those changes?

How could the symbolic meanings of the gauntlet, particularly its role in formal ritual challenges, be portrayed effectively through visual art so that contemporary viewers grasp its lingering cultural resonance?

[METHODS]

This project combines close object analysis with critical scholarship and archival research. Primary examination was conducted in the War and Tournament galleries at the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds and will be extended through visits to the Tower of London to study the Maximilian-style King’s Champion armour. It also examines materials, decorative fluting, and the practical demands of grip and mobility. Parallel work investigates the linguistic and ceremonial afterlife of the gauntlet, particularly the idiom “throwing down the gauntlet” and its survival in the 1821 coronation banquet of George IV, when Henry Dymoke performed the final full ritual of the King’s Champion. Discussions at the International Medieval Congress further informed both strands of the research.

[OUTPUTS]

Creative outputs include: (1) a visual timeline tracing the stylistic changes from mail mittens to articulated plate forms; and (2) an animated reconstruction of the scene of the 1821 challenge. These media treat artistic reconstruction as a legitimate mode of historical interpretation rather than mere illustration. By translating specialised material culture into intuitive visual formats, the project demonstrates how creative methods can open medieval archives to wider publics.

[REFERENCES]

- 1. de Cosson, Baron. “On Gauntlets.” The Archaeological Journal, vol. 41, 1884. Military Monographs 40, Ken Trotman, 2004.
- 2. National Heritage Memorial Fund. “Royal Armouries Unveils Historic Coronation Armour.” National Heritage Memorial Fund, 29 Jan. 2026, www.memorialfund.org.uk/news/coronation-armour.

