

English Mediæval Armour; as Exemplified by
Hertfordshire Brasses, &c.

BY CHARLES H. ASHDOWN, F.R.G.S.

The study of Armour is one which should be followed more or less by every antiquary, inasmuch as it often affords a valuable clue in elucidating the doubtful age of a building, the period when a monumental tomb was erected, or a brass incised. Not only did different ages of the past afford different methods of defensive equipment for the soldier, but various nationalities adopted essential styles of their own, and thus afforded topographical clues of origin as well as chronological. The comprehensive study of armour is one of extremely wide limits, and presents many intricate ramifications; to deal with it all thoroughly is utterly beyond the limits of a paper read to a learned Society. Even English armour in its entirety would be far beyond the capacity mentioned, and I have, therefore, for this evening, limited myself entirely to the Mediæval period, as affording the most useful, and probably the most interesting epoch in the development of means of personal defence. The period is thus almost entirely confined to that under the Plantagenet monarchs. A glance at the Saxon and Norman periods may, however, be instructive. The Saxon helmet was of Phrygian shape as a rule, and consisted of leather strengthened with an iron frame. The body-defence was a byrnie, or battle-sark, of leather, often strengthened by iron rings and discs being sewn upon it. The shield was large, circular and convex. As Norman influence began to prevail, ringed mail, more or less crude, was introduced, until, at the time of the Conquest, Saxon armour and arms were almost identical with those on the Continent. Norman armour consisted of garments of the ordinary fashion either quilted, to deaden the force of a blow, or covered with rings to resist the edge of a sword. The helmet was conical and furnished with a nasal, the shield being kite-shaped. This style of body armour, consisting of ringed mail over a padded or

leather under garment, continued in use for a considerable period; it was supplemented at the time of the Crusades by a heavy cylindrical helmet with a flat top and horizontal slits for vision. Surcoats also were introduced, and appear to have been made of linen or silk. Although devices are represented upon shields as early as the period of the Bayeux tapestry, they were merely decorative; it was not until the latter end of the twelfth century that fixed devices were introduced for distinguishing knights from each other, and which became hereditary.

The period of absolutely plain mail terminated about 1260, after which time secondary defences were introduced. No brass exists of a sufficiently early date to show the plain mail period, and I am therefore compelled to have recourse to representations upon effigies. These show the head protected by a *coif-de-mailles* to which the *gorget* is affixed. The *hauberk* has sleeves terminated at the wrists and mail gauntlets, subsequently the gauntlets and sleeves were made in one piece. Under the *hauberk* was invariably worn a *plastron-de-fer* or breastplate. The *hauberk* generally reaches to the knees; the surcoat is very long and full, and open in front to the waist; the shield is heater-shaped and has no *guige*, and the sword possesses a singularly-awkward hilt and crossguard. The *chausses* are furnished with *pryck-spurs*.

This kind of defensive equipment was worn during the greater part of the Crusades, in the troubles under King John, at the Fair of Lincoln in 1217, &c. Hertfordshire examples comprise:—

An effigy of a knight, much defaced, lying in the Salisbury Chapel, of Hatfield Church, *circa* 1200.

A large effigy of a knight (Lanvalei family?) with helmet covering the features, in Walkern Church, *circa* 1200.

Similar effigy in Eastwick Church.

SECOND PORTION OF THE MAIL PERIOD, 1260 to 1300.

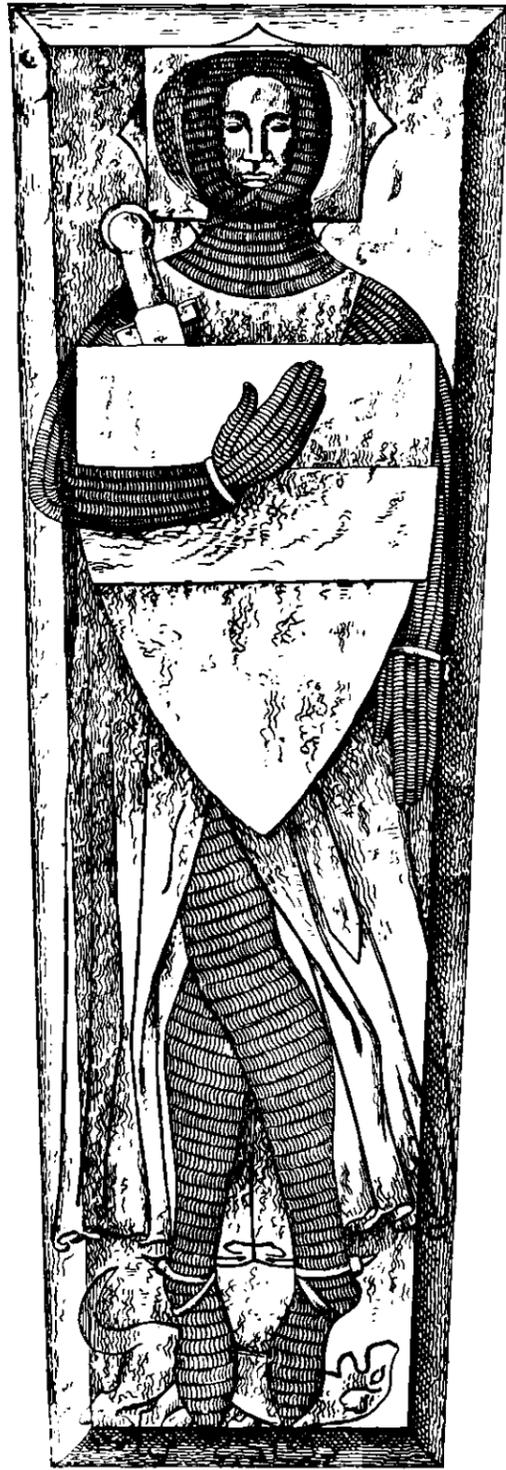
After 1260, various additions were made to the former plain mail, consisting of pieces of *cuir bouilli* over the elbows and knees, termed respectively *coudières* and *genouillières*. *Cuir bouilli* consisted of leather which

had been softened by boiling and then pressed into the required shape; to the *coudière*, above and below the elbow, the mail was fixed so as to prevent chafing of the joint. For the same reason the *genouillère* was introduced.

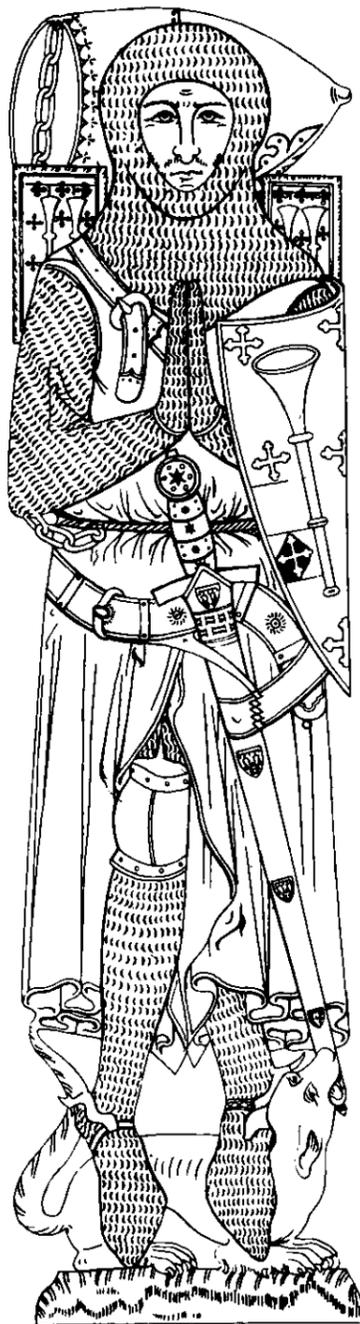
I deem myself particularly fortunate in being able to show you this evening a magnificent rubbing of the earliest English brass known to be in existence, which illustrates the early part of this second period of Mail Armour. It is from the brass of Sir John D'Aubernoun, 1277 (Ed. I.) (Fig. 1) preserved in the Church of Stoke D'Abernon, near Guildford, in Surrey, and is the only military full-length example of this reign which is not cross-legged. I may mention here that the cross-legged position does not signify that the Knight had been upon a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, or engaged in a Crusade; it was merely a position adopted by the engraver or sculptor to give what he thought was ease or repose to the lower limbs. The sleeves of the hauberk are continued so as to cover the hands without divisions for the fingers; *genouillères* only, and no *coudières* are shewn; the shield is suspended by an ornamental guige, and a peculiar arrangement of straps support the sword. Upon the small heater-shaped shield are the D'Aubernoun arms, azure, a chevron or. The representation of the lance as an appurtenance of the chief figure is unique.

About 1280, *ailettes* were introduced, and were in use for about forty years. They were the prototypes of the *epaulettes* of modern times, and form a most singular appendage to the equipment of the period. They were constructed of steel, and usually displayed the arms of the knight, their object being to afford additional protection to the neck and shoulders of the wearer. There were also dress *ailettes*, not intended for actual service, and these were made of leather covered with silk. *Ailettes* were attached to the armour by lacing-points. The brass of Sir Roger de Trumpington (in Trumpington Church, Cambridgeshire), A.D. 1289 (Ed. I.) is in most respects similar to that of Sir John D'Aubernoun, but has the *ailettes* shewn, and also the large tilting-helm fastened by a chain to the cincture round the waist.

The brass of Sir Roger de Septvans, 1306 (Ed. I.)



1



2

English Mediæval Armour; as Exemplified by Hertfordshire Brasses, &c.

1. Sir John de Bitton, Bitton Church, Somerset. A.D. 1227.

2. Sir Roger de Trumpington, Trumpington Church, Cambridge. A.D. 1289.

From Boutell's "Monumental Brasses."

(Chartham Church, Kent), may be cited as an interesting memorial, showing the ailettes and their positions. The coif-de-mailles is thrown back, showing the head bare, while the sleeves of the hauberk hang down from the wrists. Beneath the hauberk appears the termination of the under garment, called the haqueton, the stuffed leather jacket which was invariably used under a coat of mail. This armour was in use in the battles of Lewes and Evesham (1264 and 1265), during the Conquest of Wales under Edward I., and at the battle of Falkirk, in 1299.

A monument in Hitchin Church, reputed to be to the memory of Bernard de Baliol is approximately of the date 1280.

In Benington Church is the effigy of a knight, possibly Sir — Benstede, in chain armour, reinforced, and wearing a chapel-de-fer upon the head, which dates from the reign of Edward I.

MIXED MAIL AND PLATE, 1300 to 1410.

1300 to 1325.—The mail, as a rule, underwent no change, but additional plates were added to strengthen the defence. The back parts of the upper arms were protected by demi-brassarts, coudières covered the elbows, vambraces the upper parts of the forearms, and jambarts or shin-pieces protected the legs, all being strapped on over the mail. At the bend of the shoulders and elbows in front, roundels or palettes were used.

The brass of Sir — de Fitzralph, 1320 (Ed. II.) (Pebmarsh Church, Essex), affords us a good example of this period. In addition to the characteristics enumerated, we find mixed sollerets of mail and plate to protect the feet; the shield is convex and larger than formerly; the surcoat is long and ample; and a portion of the haqueton appears above the genouillère. Ailettes are omitted. This armour was in use at the battle of Bannockburn, 1314, and in the troublous times of Edward II. No example, so far as I am aware, of a military effigy or brass of this period exists in Hertfordshire.

CYCLAS PERIOD, 1325 to 1335.

The knight of this period is readily recognised by an extraordinary garment termed a Cyclas, which superseded the surcoat which had been worn for so many years.

It was cut very short in front, but reached to the knee behind, and was laced up at the sides. The multiplicity of garments worn by the warrior of this time is well shown by the brass of Sir John de Creke (and Lady) 1325 (Ed. II.) (Fig. 3) in Westley Waterless Church, Cambridgeshire.

Taking the equipment in order we have :—

1. The Cyclas, as already described.
2. The Gambeson, with an scalloped and fringed border—a stuffed and padded garment.
3. The Hauberk of Mail, now cut to a point in front.
4. The Haqueton, beneath the hauberk, reaching to the genouillères.

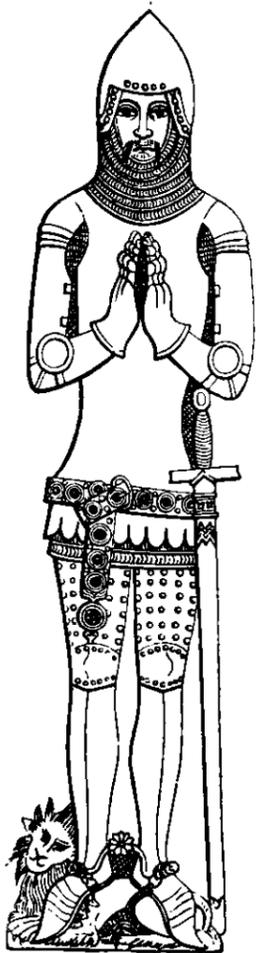
The sollerets, jambarts, coudières, and demi-brassarts were similar to the preceding period, but the forearm was entirely covered by the vambraces. The sword was supported by a simpler method than formerly. A narrow guige supported the small heater-shaped shield. On the head was a bascinet instead of the former coif-de-mailles, and from it a camail descended to protect the neck and shoulders. The battle of Halidon Hill, 1333, and the troubles in Scotland occurred during this period. There are no examples in the county of Herts.

STUDED ARMOUR PERIOD, 1335-1360.

A curious variety of defensive equipment succeeded the Cyclas period. Its chief points were the partial abolition of the great helm, a stronger bascinet with a visor taking its place; the shortening of the surcoat, and the displaying thereon above the waist the armorial bearings of the wearer; and the introduction of studs upon the defences for the body and limbs. These studs passed through plates or splints of metal, and thus fixed them to a tight-fitting leather or padded garment, the usual mail defence being underneath. This system was generally termed studded pour-pointerie. The great helm (if worn), and also the sword, were fastened to the knight by chains. Unfortunately, I am unable to show you a good example of this period, as brasses are rare, and our chief authorities are sculptured effigies. One brass, however, which is preserved in Hertfordshire, at Watton Church, that of Sir John de Paletoot, 1361



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- 3. Sir John de Creke,
Westley Church,
Cambridge. A.D.
1325.
- 4. Sir John de Pale-
toot, Watton
Church, Herts.
A.D. 1361.
- 5. Peacock (?) St.
Michael's Church,
St. Albans. A.D.
1385.
- 6. Sir John de Har-
pedon, West-
minster Abbey.
A.D. 1457.

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From Boutell's "Monumental Brasses,"

(Ed. III.) (Fig. 4) partially exhibits this peculiar method of reinforcement. The cuisses only are of studded pourpoint, probably cuir bouilli; another example occurs upon a brass to a knight unknown, in Berkhamsted Church, *circa* 1365. During the period this armour was in use, occurred the battles of Crécy, 1346, Neville's Cross, 1346, and Poitiers, 1356.

CAMAIL AND JUPON PERIOD, 1360 to 1410.

After 1360, armour assumed a decided character, and no great changes appeared for a considerable period. The chief characteristics were:—

1. The arms and lower limbs were entirely cased in plate jambarts and cuissarts, with laminated sollerets, pointed at the toes, upon the feet.
2. The hauberk reached to about the middle of the thigh, and under it a globular breastplate was used.
3. Over the hauberk appeared the jupon, a tightly-fitting surcoat without sleeves, of a rich material, and invariably emblazoned with the wearer's arms. It laced up at the sides and was often quilted.
4. The belt was remarkable both for its splendour and for the singular method of wearing it round the hips.
5. The sword appeared at the left side and the misericorde at the right.
6. Laminated epaulières and coudières were used instead of the former roundles.
7. The camail depending from the bascinet was universal.

As the period progressed the helmet became less pointed, and after 1380, the lacing of the camail to the helmet was covered with a more or less richly ornamented border. The belt, too, became more elaborate. This armour was in use at the battle of Navarette, 1367; during the operations following Wat Tyler's Rebellion; the insurrection in Wales under Owen Glendower, 1401; the battle of Shrewsbury, 1403, etc. Hertfordshire is

rich in examples of this period; some of them are as follows:—

- 1360 A Knight unknown—effigy in Bovingdon Church.
- 1361 Sir John de Paletoot (as before)—a brass in Watton Church.
- 1373 Edward de Kendale; monument in Hitchin Church.
- c. 1380 — Scales?—monument in Royston Church.
- c. 1380 Sir John Thornbury—effigy in Little Munden Church.
- 1385 — Torrington (Incent?)—effigy in Berkhamsted Church.
- c. 1385 — Peacock?—brass in St. Michael's Church, St. Albans.
(Fig. 5)
- c. 1396 — Walter de la Lee—monument, Albury Church.
- 1400 — Robert Albyn—brass in Hemel Hempstead Church.

1410 to 1430—THE SURCOATLESS PERIOD.

The armour now became a complete panoply of plate. The jupon was abolished, a polished breastplate was worn, roundles protected the shoulder-joints, fan-shaped *coudières* were used, and the *camail* was superseded by a *gorget* of plate. Below the waist appeared overlapping plates called *taces*, sewn on leather, and the sword-belt was worn diagonally over them. (Fig. 6).

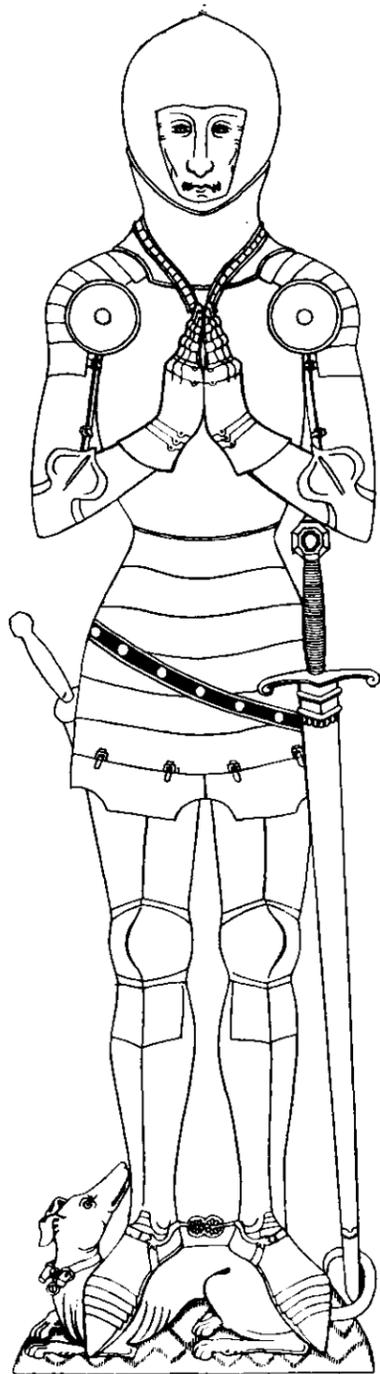
This style prevailed in the battle of Agincourt, 1415, the siege of Orleans, the battle of Herrings, etc.

Examples in Hertfordshire:—

- 1415 Sir Thomas Peryent; brass in Digswell Church. A *camail* is shewn instead of the *gorget*.
- 1421 Sir Thomas Barre; effigy, Ayot St. Lawrence (old church).

1430 to 1500—THE TABARD PERIOD.

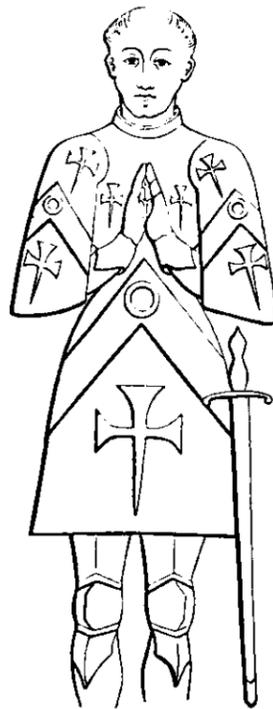
Reinforcements were added to various portions of the plate armour during this period: *tuilles*, or plates of various forms, were suspended from the lowermost *tace* to protect the thigh; elaborate defensive armour began to appear upon the left side of the figure, the right side being made lighter so as to adapt it for offensive purposes. *Placcates* were affixed to the shoulder joints, but when the shoulders were eventually protected by large reinforcing-plates they were termed *pauldrons*. Over the armour, to protect the wearer from the rays of the sun, was worn the *tabard* which had short sleeves, both body and sleeves shewing the armorial bearings of the knight. (Fig. 9).



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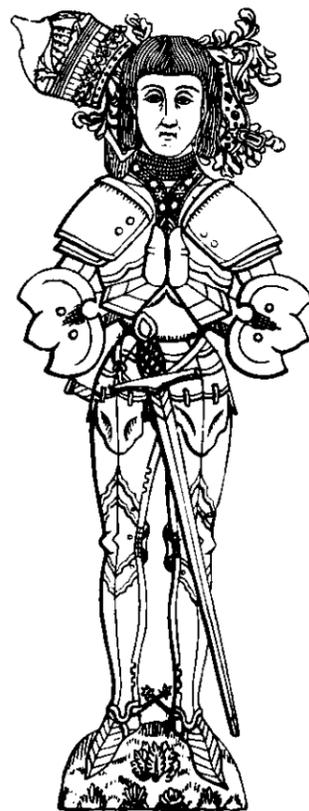


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- 7. Sir John Leventhorpe, Sawbridgeworth Church, Herts. A.D. 1433.
- 8. Sir John Peryent, Digs-well Church, Herts. A.D. 1450.
- 9. Sir William Fynderne, Childrey Church, Berks. A.D. 1444.
- 10. Sir Anthony de Grey, Abbey Church, St. Albans. A.D. 1480.



10

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From Boutell's "Monumental Brasses."

The latter part of this period may be termed the

YORKIST PERIOD ;

it is remarkable for the extravagant and fantastic character of the armour which prevailed at that time. Reinforcing-plates of every possible design were used to further strengthen various parts ; the sword was again hung in front, and a lance-rest was affixed to the breast-plate. This armour was in use in the war with France, under Bedford, after 1430, and during the period of the War of the Roses, 1455 to 1485. The Hertfordshire examples comprise :—

- 1432 Sir John de Benstede—effigy in Benington Church.
- 1433 Sir John Leventhorpe—brass in Sawbridgeworth Church.
(Fig. 7).
- 1450 Sir John Peryent—brass in Digswell Church. (Fig. 8).
- 1469 John Boteler—incised slab in Watton Church.
- 1471 Sir R. Whittingham—monument in Albury Church.
- 1473 Sir John Saye—brass in Broxbourne Church.
- 1475 — Fanshawe?—brass in Albury Church.
- 1477 Son of Alderman Field—brass in Standon Church.
- 1480 Sir Anthony de Grey—brass in St. Albans Abbey Church.
(Fig. 10).
- 1480 John Fitz-Geoffrey—brass in Sandon Church.
- 1482 Sir William Robins—brass in St. Stephen's Church,
St. Albans.
- c. 1500 Sir Ralph Verney—monument in King's Langley Church.
- c. 1500 Sir R. Clifford—monument in Aspenden Church.

To the majority of antiquaries, armour after the year 1500 presents but few features of interest. It attained its highest pitch of perfection as defensive equipment during the mediæval period, and with the advance in efficiency of firearms was gradually discarded, being used only for the tourney or for ornament. Portions of it, such as the breastplate and the helmet, survived for even two centuries or more after the period named, but armour, in the true sense of the word, became practically obsolete at the accession of the Tudor dynasty.

The list of Hertfordshire examples given in this paper is not by any means complete, and in every probability contains many inaccuracies ; the author would be very thankful for any additions or corrections that Members may kindly send to him.