

FURTHER NOTES ON THE HELMS FROM PETWORTH
CHURCH AND WIMBORNE MINSTER.

By the BARON DE COSSON.

Mr. Huyshe has asked me to add some notes to his account of these two helms.

The jousting helm from Petworth church has not been engraved to illustrate Mr. Huyshe's notice, it being of a well-known type, a type of which a magnificent example has been twice engraved and described in this *Journal*. I refer to the jousting helm, which passed from the Brocas collection into the Museum of Artillery at Woolwich, where it is now preserved.

Described by General Lefroy and excellently figured at page 60 of the twenty-fifth volume of the *Archaeological Journal*, it was again described by me, and delineated in front and profile in the Catalogue of the Helmets, &c., exhibited at the Institute in 1880, in the thirty-seventh volume of the *Journal*, where an account of the construction of these jousting helms, written in 1446, is quoted at length.

Although the Woolwich and Petworth helms are probably forty or fifty years later in date than that account, it will be found to correspond perfectly with their details of construction, for it must be observed that the changes in the fashion of jousting armour were much less rapid than in that of war harness. The latter to a great extent followed the fashion of the civil costume of the period, whilst the former, being constructed specially for an exercise the laws of which were fixed, was much slower in changing its form and make.

The Petworth helm is so very similar to the Woolwich one in type that it will only be needful to say that it is less fine in its lines and construction, not so ample in its proportions, and that its general aspect lacks that grandeur which makes the Woolwich helm so remarkable, whilst it has lost those appliances for fixing it to the breast and back plates of the jousting harness, which are so interesting to the antiquary.

That it has had them at one period would seem to be proved by the presence of the holes for the rivets which secured them to the front and back of the piece. Indeed, the holes on the front part of the helm are so numerous that the mode of attachment would at some time appear to have been altered, and this inclines me to suggest that the helm was, not as Mr. Huyshe thinks an unfinished one, but rather one which had been discarded from use. Why the majority of the rivets should have been removed I cannot pretend to explain, unless they had been capped with silver and removed on account of the value of the metal, but this is a mere guess and only put forward as such.

Helms of this kind were *only* used for the joust, with the special harness designed for that purpose, and never appear in warfare. The jousting harness of the end of the fifteenth and first years of the sixteenth centuries may be studied in its various forms in Plates xlv to xlviii of the "Triumph of Maximilian," or better still in the matchless series of real suits now in the Musée d'Artillerie in Paris.

In the helmet from Wimborne Minster, we have a very remarkable specimen of the helm used for combats on foot, a form of headpiece of considerable rarity.

I must here note that the front view of the helm in the plates accompanying these pages by no means does justice to the original. It is an exact copy of a photograph taken when the helmet was in London, but owing to the very salient form of the visor (and perhaps also through the camera having been placed too close to the object) a considerable distortion exists in it, the visor appearing unduly large for the rest of the helmet. The result is an appearance of clumsiness, which does not exist in the original.

The side view is much more accurate. It will there be seen that the large ribbed visor could be removed by taking out a pin on either side, which, passing through an arrangement like a hinge, secured it to the small pieces which were fixed by the side pivots to the crown-piece of the helm. This arrangement is found in all visored bassinets which have side pivots for the visor,¹ and it continued in use in armets until the first years of the sixteenth century.

The heads of the pins it will be seen form small rings, and a small hole will be noticed near the edge of the visor on a line with its topmost rib. The well-known statuette of St. George at Dijon² explains the use of this hole and the ring at the head of the pin, for a small chain is there seen to connect the pin with the visor, so that when the latter was removed the pins remained attached to it and could not get lost.

One curious point in this helm is the join round the back of it just in the smallest part of the neck. The armourer may have been unable to forge the whole of the crown and back of the helm in one piece, but many helms exist presenting the same difficulties of construction, in which the whole crown and back are forged in one. A somewhat similar helm from the Capel tomb in Rayne Church which is now in my possession may be cited as an example,³ as also the tilting helm in Broadwater Church so admirably described and illustrated in this Journal⁴ by the late Mr. Burges.

Both these helms, however, date from the first years of the sixteenth century, whilst the Wimborne one *may* be as early in date as 1450, and at that time perhaps the successful forging of so large and complex a piece had not been attempted.

It will be seen in the side view, that the chin-piece of the helm is not hinged to the crown-piece by the same pivots on which the visor turns, as is mostly the case in the ordinary close helmet of the sixteenth century, but it has separate pivots rather lower down and more to the front than

¹ In some visored bassinets the visor is hinged to the middle of the forehead.

² *Archæologia*, vol. xxv.


³ Engraved and described in the "Cata-

logue of Helmets, &c.," exhibited at the Institute in 1880, *Archæological Journal*, vol. xxxvii.

⁴ Vol. xxxvi, p. 78.

those of the visor. This same arrangement exists in the Capel helm and in others of similar form and period,

But the most remarkable feature in the construction of this helm is the perfectly preserved spring catch for keeping the visor down when closed.

The front view of the helmet with the visor up (Plate II) shows a small peg projecting over the upper edge of the chin piece, whilst the view of the inside of the visor shows a  shaped piece of iron against which a spring presses. A button, the shank of which passes through a nearly vertical slot in the visor so that its head is on the outside, is riveted to the end of the longest limb of this piece which works on a pivot at the extremity of its upper limb, whilst the end of the lower one is formed into a catch which, when the visor is lowered, holds on to the peg projecting from the chin-piece and thus secures the visor from being thrust up by a blow. If the button on the outside of the visor be pressed down the catch releases the peg and the visor may be raised. Few helmets of so early a date as this one are provided with this arrangement. As an additional protection against the possibility of the visor being forced up by a thrust from below, there is a small plate fixed to the chin-piece, behind which the edge of the visor falls when it is lowered.

The total absence of any traces of a means of fixing the helmet to the cuirass led to the supposition being entertained, when the helm was exhibited, that the lower part of it had been cut away. Mr. Lewis, who drew the Plates, has indicated by dotted lines in the front view his idea of the original form and means of attachment.

In many helms of this kind, however, two large holes are found near the lower edge through which passed staples fixed to the breastplate. The Astley MS. describes a similar helm as being "pynned upon two greet staplis before the breste, with a dowbille bokille behynde upon the bak."¹

The Capel and Broadwater helms already referred to were fixed in this way, but it is now impossible to determine, supposing that the Wimborne helm has lost some part of its lower edge, whether it was secured in front by staples or by a buckle, and if the present bottom edge is the original one, the means of fixing it on becomes a greater mystery still.

The resemblance of this helm in its general form and construction to the one represented in King René's work on the Tournay cannot fail to strike anyone acquainted with the illuminations in the manuscript of that book in the National Library at Paris; illuminations which have been reproduced in various works on the Middle Ages.² The most marked difference is in the visor, which in King René's helm is a barred one offering no security against a thrust from a pointed weapon, but it must be remembered that in the Tournay properly so called, wooden maces and blunted swords without any point were alone used, whilst the Wimborne helm, being designed for those combats on foot with very sharp and dangerous swords and axes which were so much in favour with the great champions of the second half of the fifteenth century, is provided with a visor of great strength, the only apertures in which are numerous very narrow slits.

A still closer resemblance to this helm will be found in the head-pieces worn by the combatants in the miniatures of another manuscript in

¹ *Archæological Journal*, vol. iv, p. 226.

² See Viollet-le-Duc "Mobilier," tome ii, p. 353. For the whole work, see

"Les Tournois du Roi René," par Champollion-Figeac, Paris, 1826-7, where all the miniatures are reproduced.

the Paris Library entitled "Cérémonies des Gages de Bataille selon l'ordonnance du Roi Philippe-le-Bel," which dating from the second half of the fifteenth century gives the armour and weapons used in combats on foot at that time.¹ The helms there worn by the champions appear to be almost identical in every particular with our Wimborne example. The weapons used are those two-handed "foining" (thrusting) swords with two roundels, of which we find the description in Oliver de la Marche,² but of which no example to my knowledge remains to us.

The large size of the visor and the great number of slits in it in all these helms for fighting on foot, were rendered necessary by the fact that the helm, being secured firmly to the cuirass, had no motion independent of the body of the knight; and to look to right or to left, up or down, he moved his head freely about *inside* the helm, which was always large enough to enable him to do so. I have already, in my portion of the catalogue of the helmets exhibited at the Institute in 1880,³ given the reasons which lead me to believe that this form of helm was during the second half of the fifteenth century described as a *bassinet*. The illumination in the Astley MS. entitled, "How a man schalle be armyd at his ese when he schal fighte on foote," represents just such a helmet which is there termed a "basnet." *Bassinets* are continually referred to in both English and French accounts of fights on foot until the first years of the sixteenth century. For further details on this subject, I will refer the reader to the thirty-seventh volume of this Journal, as it would be waste of valuable space to repeat what has so recently appeared in these pages.

I will end these notes with an account of a remarkable combat on foot, written by an eye-witness, Olivier de la Marche, as it gives an admirable idea of the nature of those fights which formed such a favourite diversion with the great warriors of his day, and for which such helms as the one just described were designed.

It took place in 1447 between Jacques de Lalain and an English esquire whom de la Marche calls Thomas Qué.⁴ This Thomas Que had accepted a challenge issued by Jacques de Lalain when the latter was staying at the court of King Henry VI of England after his combat with James Douglas in Scotland, but he having been away in Wales when the challenge was proclaimed, had only been able to accept it at Sandwich, just as Jacques de Lalain was re-embarking for Sluys, the port of Bruges; indeed he found Lalain already on board his ship, and went out in a little boat to touch his "emprise" and to tell him that he did not wish him to leave England without having had his challenge accepted, and that God aiding, he would cross the sea in six weeks' time to accomplish the contents of the chapters of that challenge.

True to his word the English esquire arrived in Bruges, to the great joy of Messire Jacques; the lists were soon erected in the old market place of the town, and the Duke of Burgundy presided as judge on

¹ The illuminations in this MS. were published by Crapelet, Paris, 1830.

² "Arme de toutes armes, la cotte d'armes au dos, et l'espée [que l'on dict estoc d'armes] empoigee, et tenoit la main senestre renversee, et couverte de la rondelle de l'estoc."

³ *Archæological Journal*, vol. xxxvii, "Introduction to European helmets, "Bassinet."

⁴ Probably Thomas Kaye. Chastelain, in his "Chronique de Jacques de Lalain," only calls him Thomas.

the day appointed. At the request of the Englishman the Comtesse d'Etampes and all the ladies of the court, with the exception of the Duchess, were present. The banners, costumes, &c., used on the occasion are described, and then the arms, which had to be submitted to the judge, each combatant being free to chose his own form of weapon. The Seigneur de la Marche shall now speak for himself.

"The one presented by Messire Jacques was a long axe with a point at its head, and on one side a beak called bec de faucon, and on the other a round hammer head with three diamond shaped points, and at its butt was a good strong dagger blade. The axe of the Englishman was a strong axe pointed at its head, with a cutting edge on one side, a long hammer on the other, and lower down was a roundel to guard the hand, and at its butt a short dagger blade.

"The Englishman sallied from his tent completely armed, wearing his surcoat of arms, his bassinet on his head, the visor down and well closed, carrying his axe in his right hand, which was covered by the roundel, and one might easily judge that he meant to do his fighting with the head of his axe. On the other side came forth Messire Jacques de Lalain, armed, wearing his surcoat of arms, and on his head he wore a little round sallad, and his face and neck were uncovered. He carried his axe justly balanced by his side, to attack or defend himself with either end which might seem most to his advantage, and advancing coolly he knelt before the Duke, whilst the Englishman advanced with proud and courageous mien.

"On meeting him Messire Jacques delivered a thrust at the visor of his adversary with the butt of his axe, but did not pierce it,¹ whilst the Englishman hit at the said Messire Jacques with all his force, with hammer, with axe, and with point; but the knight knew how to shift his ground, to advance and to retire, and was so adroit and at the same time so ardent that the esquire gained nought by his assault, but when the knight saw his chance, he struck with full swing with the head of his axe on the bassinet of the Englishman, such heavy blows that one less strong would have sustained mischief from it, had he not been felled to the ground; but the Englishman was powerful, hardy, and courageous, and when he saw the knight assault him so hotly, he moderated his attack and guarded and parried coolly, more so than at first, and Messire Jacques pressed him more hotly still. And it so happened that the knight thrust with the butt of his axe, thinking to pierce the Englishman's visor, and the latter parrying the blow suddenly with the point of his axe, the blade by mischance entered the opening in the gauntlet of the said Messire Jacques, and being sharp and trenchant it pierced his sinister arm right through at the part where it joins the hand.

"Messire Jacques drew back his arm (which bled in great profusion) and thought to regain hold of his axe by a stride backwards but his hand could not aid him, for the sinews were cut or much hurt.²

"When the good knight found himself in so grievous a plight, he placed his axe under his left arm, the butt to the front, as a woman

¹ By thrusting the point into one of the holes in the visor he would have got a hold on his man. In a combat between Jean de Compays and Antoine de Vaudrey, the champions thrust their swords into one another's visors and raised

them so that both their faces were exposed and uncovered.

² The axes used in these fights were two-handed, and too heavy to be used with one hand alone.

holds her distaff, and with the right hand, with the aid of his axe, he parried all the blows which the Englishman showered on him, save those with the point and the hammer.

"The esquire recommenced his attack more hotly and bitterly than ever, and the knight raised his wounded arm and shook his gauntlet, as it seemed to some to cause the blood to run back into his body for he was losing it fast, and others thought he wished the Duke to see that all went well with him so that he might let the combat be finished." The author then praises the Duke, who had a great personal love for Messire Jacques for not stopping the combat when he saw him in such danger. He continues—"And thus it came to pass that Messire Jacques de Lalain (who coolly and with great assurance maintained the assault of the Englishman) thrust the butt of his axe between the axe and the body of his adversary, and having got an opening closed with him, threw his wounded arm round the neck of his man and with the right hand seized him by the bassinet.

The "Englishman was heavily armed and Messire Jacques lightly, so drawing his adversary towards him with all his might, with a stride backwards he threw the esquire down flat on his face with the visor of his bassinet in the sand, and immediately axe in hand presented himself to the judge."

It was decided by the Duke that the "arms" were duly accomplished; the adversaries shook hands, and before the company left Messire Jacques had it announced by proclamation that for a whole year he would meet all comers at Chalons-sur-Soane, and an account of all the deeds done at the "Pas d'armes de la Fontaine des Pleurs" near that place in 1449 will be found duly chronicled by Olivier de la Marche and Georges Chastelain.