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Editorial

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Editorial

The last issue of *Arms & Armour* highlighted an important new arrival into the Royal Armouries' collections — a unique early 17th-century German-bladed Japanese *aikuchi*, or dirk. Since then, however, the Royal Armouries has been fortunate to secure several more important acquisitions, and those taken into the collections in 2007 are listed in the regular Recent Acquisitions section at the back of this issue. Two of these; a medieval sword for a child and a document listing armourers employed in the royal armour workshops at Greenwich, are the subject of short notes in this issue.

Confirmation of an important development, however, came just too late to be included in the 2007 list: Last year, an exceptionally important English sporting gun was threatened with export, and through our colleagues at the Wallace Collection its export was successfully opposed. The gun, made by Henry Crisp, at that time Furbisher to the Board of Ordnance at the Tower of London, was dated 1688 and had evidently been commissioned by George Legge, 1st Baron Dartmouth, who was of particular significance at that critical time in England's history. Lord Dartmouth enjoyed a very close relationship with the king, James II, and was simultaneously Master General of the Ordnance, Constable of the Tower and Commander in Chief of the Fleet. He must have asked Henry Crisp to prepare a gun for him for presentation (to a now unknown recipient), at Spithead, as the English fleet waited to oppose the anticipated arrival of the fleet of William of Orange. The gun was built around an earlier fine quality Turkish barrel and has the earliest dated silver mounts known on any English sporting gun. The significance of this gun to the Royal Armouries and to the history of the Tower of London is exceptional, and this was recognized when funds to acquire this gun were requested from the Art Fund and the National Heritage Memorial Fund. Both organizations gave generously to support the purchase of this gun for the national collection. The Royal Armouries is therefore very grateful to them, and to the gun's former owners, who were very understanding of the time the application process to secure this gun would take. This exceptional gun will be the subject of an article in the next issue of *Arms & Armour*.

In December 2007, the keenly anticipated exhibition *The Chronicles of Froissart*, opened at the Royal Armouries in Leeds. This exhibition sought to highlight how the same texts by Jean Froissart relating to the Hundred Years War were exquisitely but selectively illustrated to attract buyers in both England and France. Central within it was the stunningly beautiful Froissart manuscript owned by Stonyhurst College, in Lancashire, and around this were many beautifully prepared information panels giving information about the creation, content and purpose of the manuscripts.

The exhibition was prepared by Karen Watts, Senior Curator of Armour, in close collaboration with a number of distinguished academics from Sheffield University, led by the noted Froissart scholar, Professor Peter Ainsworth. Created by the Royal Armouries' own designer, Graham Moores, and placed in the recently created special exhibitions gallery on the museum's fifth floor, the exhibition proved very successful. Pieces of arms and armour from the period from the Royal Armouries collections were placed within it, and fascinating interactive screens gave visitors the opportunity to scan each wonderfully illuminated page of all seven surviving Froissart manuscripts. The exhibition succeeded in attracting many visitors, who had a unique opportunity to see this breathtaking assemblage of medieval historical illustration.

This issue of *Arms & Armour* contains a fascinating extended article by Philip Lankester, Senior Curator of Edged Weapons in Leeds, on information contained in a manuscript in Birmingham about the decoration of swords designed to be presented to individuals as a mark of esteem following a distinguished action. Students of arms and armour are naturally aware of such pieces as the Lloyds Patriotic Fund swords, and I am sure will enjoy this fascinating new insight into one of those specialists who originally created them.

We are always keen to secure pieces which give new insight into aspects of our subject, and the article in this issue by Dr Marianne Gilchrist helps to confirm that the Ferguson rifle now in the Royal Armouries collection (having been purchased in 2000 and illustrated in *Royal Armouries Yearbook* Volume 5), was indeed one owned by Ferguson, and bequeathed by him to his brother. Such confirmation is rare, and naturally we are delighted to have this further comments upon a rare and important piece.

The Royal Armouries great project for 2009 — the exhibition *Henry VIII: Dressed to Kill* is well under way, and promises to be a memorable event. It will bring together a number of pieces associated with the King, from collections in the UK, Europe and North America, and look at his fascination for arms and armour, his boundless enthusiasm for a wide variety of sporting activity, and why it is that he became the British monarch with the most enduring reputation.

Another ambition, too, is to produce the long-awaited catalogue of the Littlecote House Armoury, the last surviving English Civil War armoury in the country. 2008 promises to be another busy year.

Graeme Rimer
Editor