



KINGMAKER EXHIBITION

The Wars of the Roses was one of the most complex and tumultuous periods of English History which culminated in the defeat and death of Richard III at the battle of Bosworth 22 August 1485 and led to the rise of the Tudors.

The conflict had its origins in the weak rule of King Henry VI. He was overly pious and suffered from an illness which for periods left him comatose. Royal authority slowly evaporated. Into this vacuum poured the political ambitions of some of the most powerful nobles in the country all fighting for control of both the king and the throne. These nobles and their families were split between two houses within the same Royal Plantagenet family; they were the house of York and the house of Lancaster. Chief among these nobles was Richard Neville the 16th Earl of Warwick. He was so rich and powerful that whichever side he chose would stand a very good chance of winning. Initially, through family ties he sided with the house of York. And his support at the battle of Towton in 1461 led to the victory and eventual coronation of King Edward IV. The fact that the power of Warwick gave him the ability to raise to the throne and control the King of England led to him being known as the Kingmaker. However by March 1471 for reasons too complicated to discuss in this short introduction Richard Neville found himself on the opposing side supporting the house of Lancaster.

The Kingmaker exhibition recreates the night before his final battle and the preparations that would have been underway.





PREPERATION FOR BATTLE

Richard Neville is the 16th Earl of Warwick he is 42 years old and quite possibly not only the Richest and most powerful man in the country but one of the richest and most powerful men that England has ever known. His squire William is also of noble birth (Many young nobles would have to perform the role of squire as part of their training into Knighthood). He is helping his lord prepare for the forthcoming battle against the Yorkist King Edward IV. Richard Neville is leading the armies of King Henry VI and, although The Earl of Warwick does not know it, this will be his last battle and the end of his life.



THE EARLS BATTLE HORSE

The war horse, known as a destrier in medieval times was the single most powerful weapon on the medieval battle field. They were specially bred standing at least 18 hands (6ft, 1.8 metres) tall. They weighed around a metric ton and could charge at close to 30 miles an hour. Destriers were specifically trained for battle and, as the knight riding into battle would have needed his hands free for fighting, the destrier would be trained to respond simply to pressure from his rider's legs and knees. Destriers were trained to not only bite and kick on command but to also trample fallen enemies.

This is the Earl of Warwick's horse, Fortune. He is wearing head armour, known as a chamfron. The red cloth covering the horse is called a caparison. Both it and the chamfron carry the symbol of the Earls of Warwick, the Ragged Staff.

The Earl's saddle is made to measure. It is carved from solid wood and covered with soft leather and ornate silver. It is extremely heavy and surrounded by thick padding to make it comfortable to wear.





THE BLACKSMITH

The black smith would have had great importance not only here at Warwick castle but also in general medieval life. . Almost every village had its own forge or smithy where the tools required in construction such as nails, doorknobs were made in addition to weapons such as swords and amours. The fuel used in the forge was charcoal which produced the intense heat required to shape and form steel and iron.

The Blacksmith is forging a horseshoe for the Earls horse, Fortune. The shoe being made is authentic in size and shape to fir a medieval destrier such as Fortune. It was quite rare at the time for horses to have shoes as they were very expensive and only people of wealth and power could afford such luxury. The bellows that the young is operating have a horn handle which does not conduct heat thus protecting his hands. When heated steel is hammered it gives off sparks, these sparks are in fact tiny shards of metal. These shards would often stick in the arms of the blacksmith and leave permanent marks. A blacksmith might be asked to show his experience by showing these scars to a prospective employer. Hence the phrase, still used in English today.

“Show me your metal!”



THE FLETCHER

Without the work of the fletcher the arrows of the archer would not fly straight and true his job is to fix and trim the arrow flights (usually made from goose feathers). He is working in the carpenters shop where can be seen the tools of the carpenters trade. Note the wood lathe which is powered by a foot pedal.





THE ARCHER

The archer is placing his arrows into a spacer which would fit into his arrow bag. (This would never have been called a quiver, that's only for Cowboys and Indians. This spacer would help to keep his arrows separate. He would carry several different types of arrow, some for men, some for horses or to penetrate armour etc.

Before a battle begins each archer would take the arrows from the bag and stick them in the ground before him. This enabled him quickly and easily select and loose his arrows.

(We never fire an arrow we loose it).

The archer's bow is known as an English Longbow it was probably amongst the most feared weapons on the battlefield. Archers would work together and an English long-bowman could loose around 12 arrows a minute.



THE ARMOURER

The armourer is burnishing a piece of armour on a sloping bench in order to get the best possible finish. The burnishing is performed first with pumice (A very light and fragile volcanic rock which could be smashed into tiny particles which when mixed with oil created a sanding paste).

The final polish would have been performed using a strop. This would be a sheet of leather pulled very tightly and the piece of armour drawn across it several times. Stropping would also be the final process when sharpening blades and is still used today. You may have seen a barber sharpening his razor in this way.





THE PORTER

The porter is in many ways the head of security at the castle. He is responsible for controlling all access into and out of the castle. He would live in the gatehouse along with his family and a number of servants.



THE ARMOURY

As you can see the armoury is a secure area and access to weapons would have been carefully controlled.

The stonemason is carving out cannon balls he would also have made such things as trebuchet balls. It wasn't until the 16th century that steel cannon balls came into widespread use. The stone cannon ball is one of the reasons that cannon such as the one we have in this room were pretty ineffective in an attack on a castle as they would themselves shatter on impact with stone walls. They would still, however, have been effective against ships and infantry.

The black metal four spiked implements are caltrops, which would have been thrown in front of enemy cavalry in; in order to injure and bring down their horses.



BATTLE BANNERS

With the help of horn thimbles, linen thread and brass needles one seamstress sews a battle standard whilst another is repairing a tent. This room also features a cobbler and a table of herbs.

Herbs were extremely important in the middle ages and the castle would have had an apothecaries' garden where medicinal herbs would have been grown





PAYMASTER

This is Warwick's Receiver General. In peace time he is the rent collector for the Earl receiving monies from Warwick tenants. In times of war he acts as pay master for the army.



MEDIEVAL GAMES

The Archer and crossbowman are in the middle of a game of Nine Man's Morris (a game similar to draughts). They have been distracted about an argument about who is the strongest and have set about having an arm wrestling contest. It is highly unlikely that the cross-bowman will win as the archer draws an English long-bow up to 12 times a minute on the battlefield. This bow would have a draw weight (the weight needed to draw back the string fully) of 80 kilos. That is the same as lifting eighty bags of sugar 12 times a minute, which would be quite a workout.



THE BODY GUARDS

The Earl of Warwick's personal body guard are spending a last night with him before joining him in battle. David Griffith is his Herald. As with all of Warwick's army He is wearing the Livery of the Earl of Warwick, which features the ragged staff motif. In This room sword raised Richard Neville is calling his men to arms for what will be his final battle.

