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Editor's Preface

The preface for the last issue of *Arms & Armour* ended with the unhappy news of the deaths of Ted Smith, former Head of Conservation at the Royal Armouries at the Tower of London, and of Walter J. 'Chip' Karcheski, Senior Curator of the Frazier International History Museum, in Louisville, Kentucky. It is with great sadness therefore that I open this preface on the same theme.

Many of us involved with the study of arms and armour will have heard of the sad passing of Henk Visser, who died in mid June from a heart attack. Henk was a major player in promoting interest worldwide in all manner of arms and armour, especially Dutch firearms, but also had a deep professional interest in and knowledge of modern weapons. His collection was widely known through a catalogue formed of a series of monumental volumes, and his passion to see weapons preserved made a major impact on those held in important museums throughout Europe. A man of great charm and presence Henk will be sadly missed by all who knew him.

In May this year, the reorganisation of the collections-related departments of the Royal Armouries was announced. It would be led by a new Director of Collections, Steve Burt, who took up his appointment on 12 June. An experienced educator with a particular and widely published interest in the history of the City of Leeds, Mr Burt has taken over direction of the Collections Care, and Education departments, and of the newly-created department of Research and Information, as well as the National Firearms Centre, (or NFC). The NFC has a new head too, Geoffrey Cadman, whose task is to direct the development and growth of this internationally important new research facility, which will, when installation is completed, contain the combined firearms collections of the MOD Pattern Room and the Royal Armouries.

Academic activities have continued to move forward, with a successful presentation at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds by three members of the Royal Armouries' Interpretation Department. A demonstration of the construction of late 15th-century armour, followed by a foot combat with swords inspired by fight manuals of the period was received by an enthusiastic audience of over a hundred international university academics. Several of the themed monthly seminars held in the Museum building in Leeds, under the heading *History In Your Hands*, have also been well received, giving delegates the opportunity to see and handle collection material in a controlled but relaxed and informative atmosphere.

A new guidebook for the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds has been published. In addition to providing information on the collections and the gallery areas which house them this souvenir guide also provides an introduction to arms and armour for the general visitor, so that it will be a useful source of information

even after the visit has taken place. Of a more compact design than the previous guidebook, the new guide has proved popular with visitors and has been selling well. (Copies are available from the Retail Department price £4.50 + p&p, tel: 0113 220 1873).

A new display has been installed in the introductory area to the War Gallery in Leeds. The DCMS/Wolfson Museum & Gallery Improvement Fund and The History Channel have generously assisted with funding to enable new graphic displays to replace those in the former Pomp and Ceremony entrance area, and the Early War section has been entirely redesigned to make it both more dynamic and more easily comprehensible to general audiences. Areas of the main gallery space have been given new interactive displays to help visitors better understand particular natures of weapons such as bows, edged weapons and firearms, while the fourth tackles the development and form of armour. This project developed under the banner of *Hands on History*, and it represents an initiative to involve visitors more closely than before in the design, form and function of European arms and armour. If successful, this initiative will be carried to the rolling redisplay of other areas of the Museum.

Lastly, my thanks go to the authors who have contributed to this issue, which you will find has a more diverse range of articles than earlier editions of *Arms & Armour*. The distribution and subscriptions of this journal could be greater, and we are now in active discussion with our colleagues at Maney's to see what can be done to stimulate wider circulation. Naturally we would welcome any advice you may feel you wish to offer to see our distribution figures increase.

Graeme Rimer
Editor