Late Medieval Military Costume

Here we have assembled a selection of line drawings, portraying late medieval European military costume of the 14th and 15th centuries AD. The collection is by no means complete, this is not a history of European armour.

The drawings are based on period sources, i.e. funerary brasses, paintings and manuscripts. We have not included a bibliography, as most of the descriptions state the sources on which they are based.

General

Let's start with the basic peasant, reminiscent of a sack of dung tied up with string (or so TV would have us believe) armed with little more than a stick. In reality, 'peasant infantry' tended to carry a variety of unpleasant tool related weaponry, many of which were later refined into military weapons (such as the Bill) of brutal efficiency.

The basic feudal peasant, come those individuals with slightly higher incomes, who provide occasional military service, and who purchase equipment to improve their chances of surviving a tour of duty. Such equipment can range from a shield and crude iron skullcap, through to heavy layered defences of padding, mail, and plate.

For re-enactment purposes in the UK there is a minimum of safety equipment which MUST be worn to be allowed onto the field which includes

1. Some form of helmet or sallet (as approved by your group official)
2. A pair of gloves or mitts to protect the hands
3. Body protection (As defined as acceptable by your group official)

Some of these part-time amateur soldiers would progress on to our next category...
Professional soldiers, this group includes garrison troops, bodyguards, household
retainers, mercenaries etc. and usually their equipment is of a good standard. Again, armour tends to consist of layered padding, mail and plate; or the ever popular brigandine, with its many small steel or horn plates riveted between layers of leather or fabric. The more affluent members of this group, captains of companies for example, would have been as well equipped as any of the Men-at-Arms.

**Entry level professional/garrison soldier kit**

The Men-at-Arms tend to consist of middle class gentlemen, knights, petty nobility, and of course, the great nobles. These are the 'knight's in shining armour' of the historical Hollywood Epics and Re-enactment Battles, despite the fact that most of
them were not knights, and armour consist of full or partial plate armour, with mail at vulnerable areas such as armpit and groin. Brigandines were also popular, with luxurious coverings such as velvet.

**Italian import soldier kit**

![Italian Import 1460ish](image)

- Most imported armour was kept black down the force and held in lands, armories. The most powerful lords could equip hundreds of troops by themselves, let alone the knights who served them.
- Simple cuirass sometimes with covered top plate.
- Simple arms and shoulders most likely for munitions, floating more English. Artelated Italian.
- Legs were 
  - Italian suggests longer wings on knees

**Style conscious man-at-arms kit**
This is by no means, a complete guide to late Medieval armour but hopefully assists you in deciding the level you wish to enact and therefore some guide to the equipment you should have.
English Troops

ARCHERS

Archer, c.1450
From the St. Albans Chronicle. The cross is red on a white surcoat.

Archer, Wars of the Roses
A Yorkist from a Flemish ms. depicting the battle of Tewksbury (1471). He has a white rose embroidered in outline on his pink doublet.

Archer, Wars of the Roses
From the John Rous Pageant, c.1485.

Mtd. Archer
From woodcut c.1475. Philippe de Commynes, writing of Montlhéry, describes the Burgundian archers there as resting 'with their boots off...'

By the time of the Wars of the Roses, the equipment available to an archer, even raised by levy, could vary considerably. Towns were supposed to field men and equip them for service when called upon by the crown, ordinances laid down the standards of equipment required for each type of troop and the weapons they were to be furnished with. Typically an archer would have his own bow and a sheaf of 24 arrows, some form of padded jack or jerkin, a sallet/helm and a side arm. Additionally, many would have been capable of fighting with short sword and small round shield called a buckler. The archers retained by wealthier knights in a retinue as livery and maintenance men would have been equipped according to their master’s pocket and inclination. Illustrations in later C15 manuscripts of Froissarts Chronicles frequently show the archers of this period wearing brigandines, small belly hugging plate defences called plackarts augmented by shirts, skirts and neck protection of maille and occasionally leg defences.
At this period in English military history, the backbone of the armies of both York and Lancaster were made up of the archers and foot soldiers in ratios 3:1 to 8:1 respectively. By the start of the C15 the livery archer emerges as capable and well prepared citizen soldier who, if selected by the Commissioner of Array or as part of the indenture of a land owning lord, could earn 6d per day while serving the crown overseas. Along with this substantial wage, equivalent to that of a craftsman came the prospect of a share in any plunder they could acquire; as such, service could make an archer a relatively wealthy man. This if nothing else, acted as an incentive to draw many men into the years of dedicated practice necessary to be proficient with the bow.

The bow on the battlefield
Bowmen were used to great effect on the continent of Europe, as assorted kings and leaders clashed with their enemies on the battlefield. The English tactical system relied on a combination of bowmen and heavy infantry, such as dismounted men-at-arms. Difficult to deploy in a thrusting mobile offensive, bowmen was best used in a defensive configuration. Against mounted enemies the bowmen took up a defensive position, and unleashed clouds of arrows into the ranks of knights and men-at-arms. The ranks of the bowmen were extended in thin lines and protected and screened by pits (e.g. Crecy), stakes (e.g. Agincourt) or trenches (e.g. Morlaix). There is some academic controversy about how the bowmen and close combat infantry related on the battlefield. According to the traditional view articulated by A.H. Burne, the bowmen were deployed in a "V" between divisions of infantry, enabling them to trap and enfilade their foes. Other, more recent, historians such as Matthew Bennett dispute this, holding that the archers were normally deployed on the flanks of the army as a whole, rather than between divisions

Archers Equipment as listed in the 1473 Burgundian Ordnances

Sallet (with or without visor), maille standard, brigandine, padded jack (mounted archers should also have; thigh boots, horse and saddle).
Bow and sheave of arrows, lead hammer, bastard sword, dagger
2nd half 15th Century
Source not given, ms. c.1450-85. Sources show infantry wearing any combination, or even all, of the following: sallet, mail hood, aketon, habergeon, full plate body armour, plackart, couters, poleyns, arm-harness, gauntlets, sabatons, and leg-harness. He carries a glaive other popular weapons include the ox-tongue (a) and partisan (b).

Liveried Retainer, c.1485
From the John Rous 'Pageant of the Birth, Life and Death of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick' c.1485-90. He wears a red jacket with the ragged staff in white. Also used by Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick.

Billman, Wars of the Roses
From the John Rous Pageant, c.1485.

Close combat infantry, c.1450
Source not given,
The sword remained the knightly weapon par excellence. But that does not mean only knights had swords or that all had swords of the same quality. One basic type of sword for common infantry is:

**The Falchion**

A rarer form of sword that was little more than a meat cleaver, possibly even a simple kitchen and barnyard tool adopted for war. Indeed, it may come from a French word for a sickle, "fauchon". It can be seen in Medieval art being used against lighter armors by infidels as well as footman and even knights. The weapon is entirely European and not derived from eastern sources. The falchion's wide, heavy blade weighted more towards the point could deliver tremendous blows. Several varieties were known, most all with single edges and rounded points. A later Italian falchion with a slender sabre-like blade was called a "storta" or a "malchus" (the reenactent sabre-falchion!). Another similar weapon in German was the *Messer*, two-hand versions, called *Grosse Messers*, with straight or curved single-edged blades were known by 1500.
The inferior ranks were armed with the "humbler" weapons of the Medieval Warfare. Weapons like the halberd, the partisan, the javelin, and the bill were used by the foot soldiers, who were still named brigands, as in the earlier ages. The short axe is rarely shown in the hands of the knights, as it appears that it was more a weapon of the less dignified order of soldiery. The principal varieties of the axe were: the single blade; and the double weapon, in which one side has a horizontal blade and the other a pick.

Other alternative side-arms for common foot soldiers

1. Club
2. Club with nails in (not allowed on re-enactment battlefield, for display only)
3. Mace (not allowed on re-enactment battlefield, for display only)
4. Hedging bill
5. Hand axe
6. War-hammer (not allowed on re-enactment battlefield, for display only)
7. Fighting dagger or knife
MEN @ ARMS

**Professional Infantry?**

From editions of Froissart, depicting soldiers of the Hundred Years War but portrayed in contemporary costume c.1465-85. French Captain at the fall of Caen, plumed helmet, & leather fringed spaulders

**Currour, Wars of the Roses**

From the John Rous Pageant, c.1485. The Pageant also shows an artillerist wearing almost identical equipment, except for the lack of helmet and gauntlets (the better to shoot with).

**Man-at-Arms,**

From Albrecht Durer, early study for the Knight, Death and Devil woodcut, c.1498. Instead of a bevoir, he wears a fringed hood tied under the chin, and is wearing a short open jacket over his body armour.

For the pursuit of a defeated foe, the lance retained its ancient efficacy, and it was still the most honored weapon in the tournaments. The length of the lance was 12-14 feet. The material was usually ash. The head kept the leaf-form or lozenge-form. For infantry use, the same lance was cut down in length if required (as was done regularly during the HYW)

KNIGHTS & NOBLES

The knightly sword, with its pear shaped pommel, may be taken as the type of this weapon
during the 15th Century. The pommel may be also round, sometimes of a more elaborate shape, the cross-piece straight, with the ends curved towards the blade. The most common type of knightly sword was the “hand and a half” or bastard sword, double edged, often diamond section narrowing to a point. Very stiff in the blade and used more for thrusting at gaps in the armour and weak points.

The battle-axe and the pole-axe may be considered as being the same weapon, the difference between the two consisting in the length of the shaft. While one hand was sufficient to handle the battle-axe, the use of the pole-axe necessitated both hands. Both consisted of an axe-blade upon one side balanced by a spike upon the other. The pole was provided with one or two guards for the hands, and was strengthened with iron splints. The martel-de-fer was also in vogue. It was a hammer type of weapon, short-handled, or long-handled. The hammer itself was plain or dentated. French men-at-arms were equipped each with a five feet spear and a battle-axe and employed such weapons at the field of Agincourt.

**Fra. John Longstrother, c.1471**
John Longstrother, Lieutenant-Turcopoliier of the Hospital by 1448, Castellan of Rhodes by 1453, Grand Commander of Cyprus in 1467. Became Grand Prior of England in 1469 and was made Treasurer of the kingdom by Edward IV, against whom he fought at Tewksbury in 1471. The figure comes from a ms. of c.1485 depicting his execution after the battle.

**Man-at-Arms, c.1487**
Gothic harness that betrays some Italian influence in the tassets and breastplate. The single feather crest is seen in a considerable number of European sources and seems to have been used to denote men of rank.

**Man-at-Arms, c.1480**
Harness of the Arch Duke Sigmund of Tyrol, c.1480.

**THE POLEAXE**
- Poleaxe - This weapon consists of a broad, short axe blade, hammer on the reverse, and top spike. Mounted on a wooden shaft, or pole, which was between 4 and 5 feet
often with a spike at the bottom of the shaft.

- The name of this weapon is derived from the word 'pollaxe' from old English word "head axe" - they were originally axes mounted on poles
- Other types of poleaxe -
  - A Bec de Corbin or “Crows Beak” where the hammer head is replaced by a curved armpur piercing fluke (spike)
  - A Bec de Faucon was a polearm with a large hammer head instead of an axe which also featured a spike or curved fluke.
- Used as a versatile weapon against armoured opponents. The weapon was constantly developed and refined to include metal discs to protect the hands, and metal strips of langets running along the shaft, to prevent the head of the weapon being cut off
- A blow could apply tremendous force capable of causing significant injury to an opponent.

Glaive was a broad-bladed, edged polearm, looking like an 18” butcher-knife on a 6 foot pole.

Mercenaries

CROSBOWMEN
Florentine Crossbowman
From a painting of the battle of Anghiari

Crossbowman,
From a 15th C. edition of Froissart. (1440) c.1470.

Crossbowman,
From the John Rous Pageant c.1485 at Caen (1417).

Crossbowman, c.1461-83
From a ms. of Louis XI's reign. His only armour is a simple sallet, plate poleyns strapped to his knees, and a mail standard, presumably part of an arming doublet.

GUNNERS

The 15th Century saw the first hand-gunners. The hand-gun was made of iron, and it was a much smaller version of the gun used in the field. It consisted of a metal tube fixed in a straight stock of wood; the vent was at the top of the barrel; it was no lock of any kind. The barrel was of iron or brass, and these barrels were occasionally furnished with moveable chambers.
Handgunner, Wars of the Roses
From the Chroniques d'Angleterre, c.1470. His gun is little more than an iron tube with no apparent trigger mechanism, despite the fact that shaped gunstocks and serpentine triggers were by now fairly widespread throughout Europe.

Burgundian Handgunner & Artilleryman,
From a 1470 Burgundian ms.

Master Gunner, c.1400
The figure here is actually shown in the original ms. sighting a bombard, while being protected by a fully armoured man with a large shield.

Hand gunners,
Source not given, c.1430 - 1440.

IRISH TROOPS
**Irish Kern, 14th/15th Century**

From Monstrelet's description c.1418 (the sleeves of the *Leine* worn here were copied from contemporary English fashions. The moustache was so characteristic that in 1447 it was enacted that 'all who would be taken for English' must shave both lips.

The ordinary Irish foot soldiers, made up partly of "bonnachts", or Irish mercenaries maintained by the various nobles, and partly of free peasantry called out to fight. The bonnachts might sometimes be dressed like the gallowglasses, or else like the rising-out, as the peasants were called; that is, no armour, simply the traditional Irish dress of a linen tunic with very wide sleeves, often dyed yellow with saffron, usually worn over tight trews of a plain color, and sometimes covered with a very short coat of goat's hair or a large mantle or "shag-rug", patterned, and with a long fringe of "an agreeable mixture of colors".

Bonnachts might have been armed with the sparth-axe, but the usual weapons were javelins or "darts" of which each kern had a handful; even the English admitted that the Irish were extraordinarily skilled with this weapon, but said it was "More Noisesome, especially to the Horse, than deadly".

A few of the kern also used the bow, and a sword or spear and shield might be carried; the shields were oval and convex, of wood or basket-work. Each man would also carry a "skean" or long dagger. They were often clean-shaven but wore flowing moustaches and a mop of shaggy hair or "glib" falling over the forehead.

Their tactics were normally those of skirmishers, especially in difficult country where, often, no other troops could move, but they could also charge fiercely in the right circumstances, clashing their weapons together with a loud cry of "Pharroh!" (Probably really "Faire"—"Watch out!") What they couldn't do was to stand up against cavalry in the open.

**Gallowglass, 14th/15th Century**

From the Burke effigy at Glinsh in Galway. The equipment of the Gallowglass under Turlough O'Donnell, King of Tyrconnell (1380-1422) is set down as 'for each man equipped with a mail corselet and a breastplate another should have a jack and a helmet... there should be no forfeit for a helmet deficient except the galloglaich's brain'
These were originally Scots mercenaries, and usually wore an iron bascinet, and either a mail shirt or a short cape of mail over a padded quilted coat called a "cotun" and their characteristic weapon was a heavy two-handed axe, up to six feet long, which could chop the enemy's head off with a single blow.

Gallowglasses were organized in "battles" of 80 or 87 men, but each gallowglass was accompanied by two boys, who carried his supplies, armour, and his secondary weapons, three light Irish javelins or "darts". Clan chiefs would be equipped as Gallowglass.

**The Gentry**

Irish nobility were remarked upon as being “more English than the English themselves” as such would have worn the latest version of plate armour they could afford and would be indistinguishable from English Men @ Arms.
a. Irishman in mantle. Cap is of a type worn by Irish irregulars.


c. IGNORE – 17th century.

d. IGNORE Irish chieftain, 17th Century.

e. and f. A pair of Gallowglasses. 'f' has a somewhat Scandinavian look and has a typical sword and scabbard, tall helmet with small crest (?), and long-handled axe. Note baggy sleeves, mail cape, typically 15th Century bascinet, and seven-foot Lochaber axe. Both are barelegged, and could have been barefooted too.

g. Gallowglass in "cotun", mail cape and helmet.

h. Gallowglass in mail cape and skirt and cavalry-style helmet. Note different shape of axe (based on a Durer drawing).

i. Two alternative Gallowglass helmets. The upper drawing depicts a 15th Century padded type.

j. Typical Irish sword. Note ring at base of hilt with tang passing through it, and square-ended scabbard. Irish swords of this period were usually straight, and large. There are alternative scabbard types, with a dagger strapped to the outside of the scabbard.
FURTHER IMAGES

Several images; some from the period and some modern interpretations.

If you look like any of these then well done!
Primary Sources for the Wars of the Roses by Kyle Glover

1: Gregory's Chronicle:
http://www.british-history.ac.uk/source.aspx?pubid=326
Covers much of the later middle ages, but the 1451-60 and 14-61 sections cover the first half of the Wars of the Roses, including the first battle of St Albans

2: The Arrivall of Edward IV:
Covers the invasion of England by Edward IV in 1471, the battles of Barnet and Tewkesbury and the siege of London

3: The Crowland/Croyland Chronicle:
http://www.r3.org/on-line-library-text-essays/crowland-chronicle/
Covers almost all of the Wars of the Roses and most of the major battles, from St Albans to Bosworth.

4: The Paston Letters:
https://archive.org/stream/pastonlettersori01fenn#page/n7/mode/2up
A collection of letters, correspondance and records of a Norfolk family throughout the Wars of the Roses, including their manor being besieged and men being summoned for Bosworth.

5: The London Calendar of Letter-books:
http://www.british-history.ac.uk/source.aspx?pubid=174
Just Don't Go There...

Live Role-player, late 20th Century
Source not given, wearing leather armour, with a skirt of pteruges that can only be described as inadequate, leather knee boots, and rather curious and apparently pointless straps round the thighs.

DO NOT DRESS LIKE THIS!