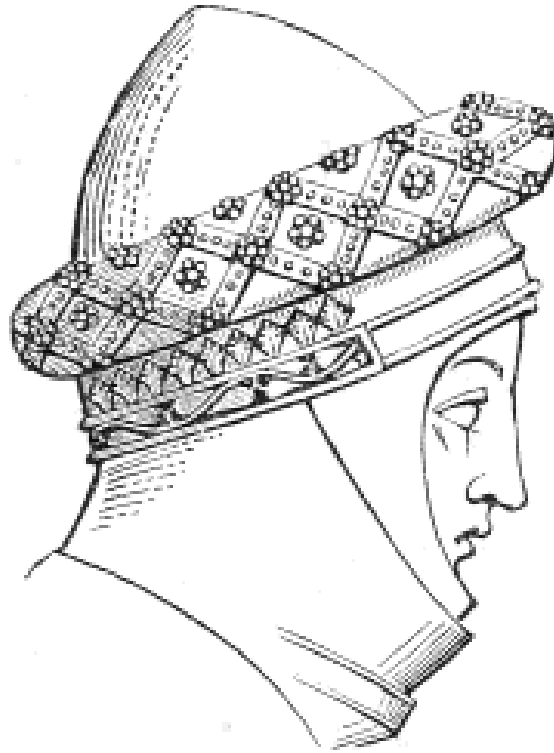


# The Orle – A 15<sup>th</sup> Century Knights Fashion Accessory



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## The Orle

The orle is thought to have come into fashion between the first and second decades of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and is a roll of stuffed cloth or leather which is placed on a bascinet for decoration. Extant depictions of orles show rich embroidery and ornamentation with costly textiles and gold thread. Settings of stones and jewels are also seen (Boutell 1914, p219, Blair 1972, p45). Orles in the 15<sup>th</sup> century are not depicted with a mantle.

There are two possible origins for the orle. The first is as a purely decorative ornament for a helm while the other possibility is as a development of the padded roll worn on the head or over a mail coif, as padding or an aid to stabilisation, and onto which a helm is placed (see fig.1).



Fig.1 Examples of Padded Rolls (Blair 1972, p34)

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, if the orle was used as padding, it would have been placed onto a bascinet with the great helm being placed over the top. Ffoulkes (1973) disagrees with this potential use and argues that extant depictions of orles are shown at an angle that would not allow proper placement of a great helm (see fig.2). Ffoulkes goes on to point out that the highly ornamented nature of the decoration would also lead to damage of the jewels and embroidery if crushed between the inner bascinet and outer great helm.

Figure 2 shows the head of the effigy of Sir H. Stafford from Bromsgrove depicting embroidery and jewel work common to orles from the 15<sup>th</sup> century.



Fig.2 The monument of Sir H.Stafford from Bromsgrove, Kent (Boutell p219)

The funeral effigy of Sir Edmund Thorpe 1418AD (fig 3 & 4), shows the level of ornamentation and attention to detail that a symbol of wealth and status would require in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century.



Fig.3 and 4 Edmund de Thorpe 1418

<http://www.gothiceye.com/pictures.asp?categoryID=3&offset=72>

The effigy of Lord Bardolph, died 1441 AD, located in St. Marys, Suffolk (fig 5 & 6) is an example of the richness of ornamentation and embroidery that can be found. (<http://www.suffolkchurches.co.uk/Dennington.htm>)

The Bardolphs were an important family (as William was chamberlain to Henry VI, a hero of Agincourt and Harfleur and a knight of the garter) and so Lord Bardolph can be expected to have worn only the best.



Fig. 5 & 6. The effigy of Lord Bardolph 1441 AD  
<http://www.holycross.edu/departments/visarts/projects/kempe/model/7c.html>

### Recreating an Orle

In attempting the long distance recreation of an orle, reliance on web site photography or secondary sources is required. Web photography is preferred as it eliminates differences between artists impressions.

An example of the difference between artists reproductions is shown by the two depictions of the effigy of Sir H. Stafford (Fig 7 & 8). Though the depictions are generally the same, the level of detail and differences in dimensions can be misleading.

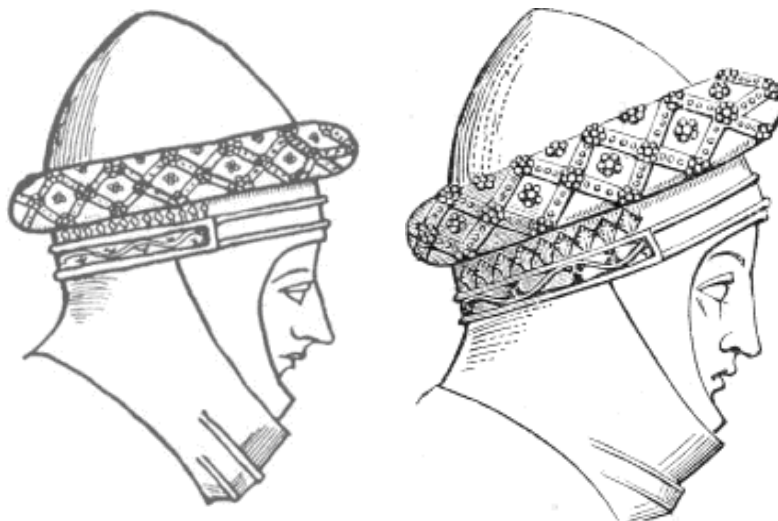


Fig 7 & 8. Two representations of the effigy of Sir H. Stafford, the first from Ffoulkes and the second from Boutell.

A recreation of an orle by the author is shown below (fig.9). The materials used are red and white velveteens, premade gold trim, freshwater pearls, “ruby” jewel buttons and a costume jewellery brooch (a lucky ebay find). On further examination the recreation is approximately twice to 1/3 wider then it should be, depending on which example is used as a source. The recreation is also certainly far less elaborately decorated then the examples shown above.



Fig. 9. Authors recreation of an orle.

### **Bibliography**

Blair, C. (1972) *European Armour*, William Clowes & Sons, London

Boutell, C. (1914) *Handbook to English Heraldry*, Reeves & Turner, London

Ffoulkes, C. (1973) *Armour and Weapons*, EP Publishing Ltd