



A Reproduction of a 15th Century Style Falconer's Gauntlet

By Lady Brianna McBain CoM, CoSC

This style of gauntlet appears to have been used throughout Europe from the 10th to the 15th centuries. I have chosen to call it a 15th century style, because I have based it largely on the examples seen in the Devonshire Hunting Tapestries (circa 1450) which offer the most detailed look at these gloves. (Fig. 1) These are intended primarily for the left hand, (which is the hand that carries the hawk while on foot) though there are examples of mounted falconers carrying the hawk on the right hand.

The development of the Falconry Gauntlet

While I joined the SCA in 1982, I have only been studying falconry in earnest for the past four years. One of the things I noticed when researching period falconry was the development of the falconer's gauntlet into its modern form. The current form of gauntlet used is made of thick, stiff leather, (often cow or elk hide) with a wide gusseted cuff (usually made of a separate piece) an overlay of stiff leather on the hand, and having a leather tassel at the cuff. A modern falconer's gauntlet is on the table for comparison. This style of gauntlet first begins to appear in the late 1500's. Here is a picture of Henry VIII's falconry glove, from the University of Oxford, Ashmolean Museum. (fig. 2) You can see there is a double thickness overlay on the hand, much like a modern falconry glove, and the cuff is gusseted. (In all likelihood there was once a tassel as well, which, along with some cuff edge embroidery is now missing.

Fig.1



Fig.2



The origins of the tassel

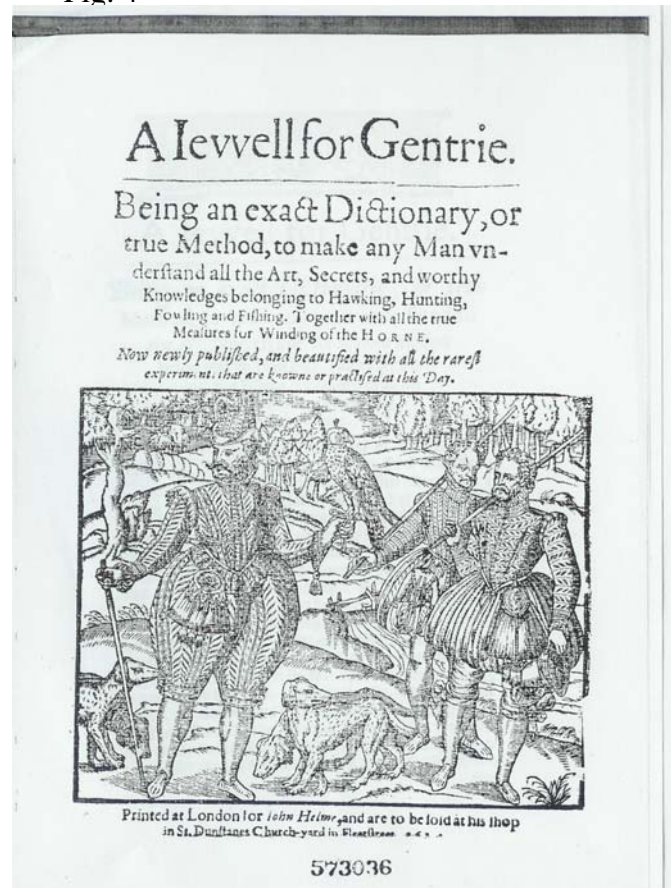
While the tassel is *de rigueur* on modern falconry gloves, when I asked other falconers what was its purpose and meaning, the only answer I received was “Its Traditional!” But no one knew why. But one day I came across this detail in the Devonshire Hunting Tapestries, (circa 1450) and I began to form a theory. (fig. 3)

As you can see, the falconer has made a hole in the cuff of his gauntlet, through which he has tied his hawk's leash. This is the earliest depiction I can find of a falconer having something dangle off the cuff of his gauntlet. But it is a clever and useful thing, as he can easily secure the leash, yet have it close at hand. Now, supposing he tied and knotted the dangling leash, it would resemble a tassel, yes? It is interesting to note that of all the falconers depicted in this tapestry, this is the only one who had modified his gauntlet in this manner. I believe we are seeing here the beginning of a trend. As later falconers begin to copy this style, and fashions changed so that the wearing of gloves becomes more common, I believe it became necessary to distinguish the falconer's glove from an ordinary glove (as the falconer's glove is as much a symbol of his office as anything) So that by the late 1500's, every falconer's glove sports a leather tassel dangling from the cuff. Compare this to the facsimile of the title page of a 1614 treatise on falconry, (fig. 4) where the falconer's glove is immediately recognizable by the tassel, which by now is a purely decorative element, and serves no function.

Fig. 3



Fig. 4



However, prior to this, falconry gloves are simple affairs, with the cuff and hand cut as a single piece, and with as few seams as possible, and little or no ornamentation. These were simple, practical affairs. It is this style which I have chosen to duplicate, as it is the precursor to the modern form.

Material

I confess that at first I was rather surprised to see the way that this type of gauntlet appeared to fold and drape, compared to a modern gauntlet which is a rather stiff affair. I had doubts that such a lightweight looking glove would offer suitable hand protection to the falconer. But then I learned that it was the custom in those days to dull the talons of the newly-caught hawk. And after the hawk is trained, she will then grip so lightly that it is indeed possible to carry her bare-handed. Modern falconers do not dull the talons of their birds, so a heavier glove is needed, particularly when the hawk is new and wild. But if it is possible to dispense with the glove entirely, why use it? The glove does offer one distinct advantage; human skin is slippery and wiggly and difficult for a hawk to grip lightly and still maintain her balance. With a leather glove fit snugly over the hand, the bird has a firm gripping surface.

As for what sort of leather was used, this passage gives us an idea. This is attributed to Hywel the Good, a Welsh prince (c 925) but his “laws of the court” from which this is taken, were copied and incorporated into English law as well, and appear well into the thirteenth century. This section deals with the rights and duties of the royal falconer:

“ He is to have the skin of a hart in autumn, and the skin of a hind in the spring, to make gloves for bearing his hawks, and for making jesses”¹

This shows us that the soft, drapery leather used in the gloves is indeed deerskin, and interestingly, it was the falconer himself who made his own gloves. I am fortunate in having a husband who bow-hunts, so he had no difficulty obtaining a deer hide for me. I had it tanned by a professional tanner (vegetable tanned) with the result that I now had soft leather that would fold and drape as the period gloves appeared to, yet be of suitable thickness. Surprisingly I also discovered that for all its softness, the deerskin is also quite puncture-resistant, and does indeed offer good hand protection. For the hand stitching, I used a sturdy linen thread. (As was used in the extant glove in fig. 2)

Pattern

I spent nearly a year examining glove patterns, from period to modern. There are very few period glove patterns, and most of those were drawn from examining extant gloves. But the problem with that is that the few extant gloves we have are either ceremonial or highly ornamented. The everyday work glove was used until it wore out, and then discarded. So we have no actual examples to see, only pictures. So what I did to create my glove pattern was to compare pictures of period gauntlets with a modern falconry gauntlet, and developed my own pattern. That is, it should have the same lines as the period falconer’s gauntlet, but it should also be uncomplicated. Remember, this would have been made by a falconer, not a professional glover, and it was a hunting glove, not a dress glove. It’s going to get scratched, stained, and bloody. I believe my result is a credible imitation of what a falconer’s glove of the period would have looked like. It fits me well and functions well. Here is a thirteenth century description of what a falconer’s glove should be:

“...it should reach to his elbow and be wide enough to be drawn off and on with ease. It must be made of stout leather of a quality that will not permit the talons of the falcon to cling to it, and thus be easily pierced by the beak or claws. When the falcon is thrown from the hand, she will rise more freely from such a properly fitting glove.”²

fig 5



fig 6





Fig. 7



Fig. 8

Summary

I had a lot of fun with this project, and researching it gave me new appreciation and insight into the history and construction of the glove, a simple object I had hitherto taken for granted. I learned that gloves were highly symbolic, as well as functional. It was also more challenging than I expected, as the hand is a uniquely shaped object, which must flex and move. The most difficult part was the fitting and positioning of the thumb piece. Much of the construction seemed counter intuitive, and it was only during the assembly that it all began to make sense. Overall, it was quite a learning experience, and I am glad I challenged myself to do it.

Figures:

Fig 1: (detail)

Medieval Life and Leisure in the Devonshire Hunting Tapestries by Linda Wooley, V&A Publications, London, 2002

Fig.2: The University of Oxford, Ashmolean Museum <http://ashmol.ox.ac.uk/amulets/tradescant/07-07.html>

Fig 3. (detail) Wooley

Fig.4. (title page) A Jewell for Gentry (author unknown) printed at London for John Holmes in 1614, reproduced in facsimile by W.J. Johnson, New Jersey, in 1977

Fig 5. from Verdun. Bibliotheque Municipale MS 107 Breviary of Marguerite de Bar f.12 circa 1300

Fig 6. from the Treatise of Walter de Milemete, De Nobilitatibus Sapientis et Prudentis Regum, Oxford, Christ Church Library, MS E11 circa 1326

Fig. 7 (detail) Wooley

Fig. 8 My glove, with the cuff turned back as in fig. 7

Endnotes:

1. The Kings and Their Hawks; Falconry in Medieval England by Robin S. Oggins, Yale University, 2004. , pg 40,41
2. De Arte Venandi cum Avibus (The Art of Falconry) by Frederick II of Hohenstaufen circa 1250. translated by Casey A. Wood & F. Marjorie Fyfe, Stamford University Press, California, 1990. Page 151 Also compared with the facsimile edition published by Harenberg Kommunikation, Harenberg, Germany, in 1986

Other Sources used:

The Art of Medieval Hunting: The Hound and the Hawk by John Cummins, Castle Books, New Jersey, 2003.

An Approved Treatise of Hawks and Hawking by Edmund Bert, Gentleman. Printed by T.S. for Richard Moore in London, 1619. Facsimile edition by Argue Publishing, UK, 2005

A Perfect Booke for Keping of Sparhawkes or Goshawkes (author unknown) from a manuscript dated 1575, transcribed edition by Argue Publishing, UK 2005

A Short Discourse of Hawking to the Field with high flying Long-winged Hawkes By Sir Thomas Sherley, printed in London in 1603 for Thomas Man. Facsimile edition by American Falconry Archives, 2004

Falconry and Hawking by Phillip Glasier , The Overlook Press, NY 1998

Falconry Equipment: a guide to making and using falconry gear by Bryan Kimsey and Jim Hodge, Kimsey/Hodge publications, TX 1992

Falconry Uncommon (containing The Falconry Treatise of King Dancus, c 1284) by George Kotsiopoulos, Hancock House Publishers ltd, BC, 1999

Make Your Own Gloves by Gwen Emlyn-Jones, A.H. & A.W Reed ltd, New Zealand, 1974

Love of a Glove by Collins, C. Cody Fairchild Publishing Co. Ed 1945

<http://www.glove.org/> A useful site by Franchesca V. Havas on period gloves.