

Landeszeughaus

Visitors' Guide



The beginnings of the Styrian Armoury

The period from the 15th to the 18th centuries was a turbulent time for the dukedoms of Styria, Carinthia and Carniola. Known collectively as 'Inner Austria', the region was afflicted with continuous armed raids and military conflicts with Hungarian rebels and the Ottoman Empire.

Against this background, between 1642 and 1647 the Styrian estates had the 'regional armoury' built according to plans drawn up by Antonio Solar. As an arms depot, it was from then on the most important centre for equipment in the southeast of the Habsburg Empire.

As armed conflicts abated during the 18th century, the armoury became less important. When, as part of a series of reforms, Maria Theresia decided to centralise the armed forces and to close the Graz armoury, the estates asked for it to be preserved as a 'monument to regional history'. The armoury first opened its doors to the general public in 1882. During the final years of the 19th century it was absorbed into the Joanneum (founded by Archduke Johann) and so finally gained museum status.

Today, the Landeszeughaus is one of the largest preserved historic armouries in the world. Its 32,000 objects bear witness to a period of intense conflict, serving as a memorial to regional history, a sensitive heritage site and also a challenging task for restorers and curators.



1st floor: Firearms

The first floor holds mainly firearms from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries: guns such as cannons, mortars and 'Doppelhaken' wall guns served in the defence of fortifications. At the end of the 16th century, muskets became the most important weapon for foot soldiers due to their increased range and force. The cavalry used smaller, lighter firearms such as pistols and harquebuses. The latter were only about one metre long and earned the lightly armed cavalry the moniker 'harquebusiers'.



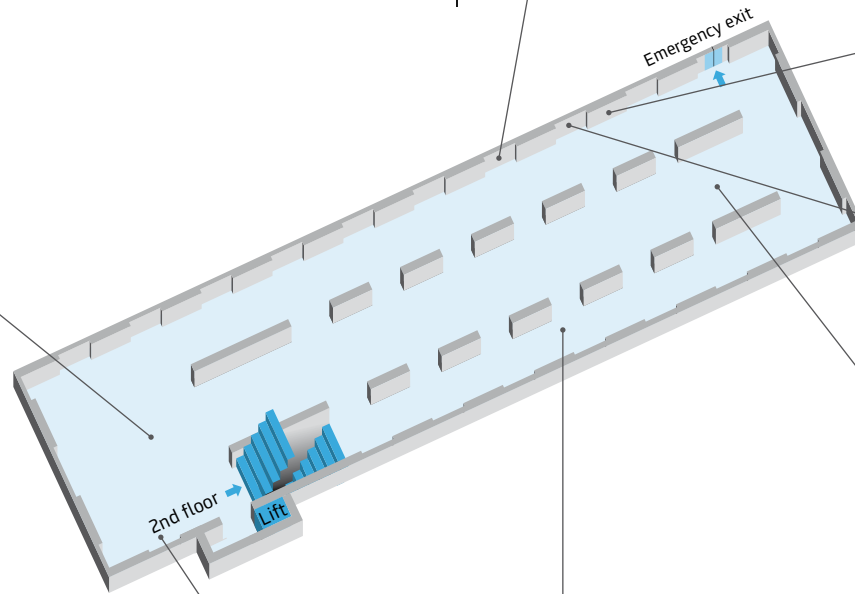
At the end of the 18th century, French troops also occupied Graz. In order to deprive them of access to the abundance of weapons stored at the armoury, most of the cannons were taken to what today is Serbia. Because they were later sold there, only a few of the original stock are preserved here at the armoury.



Today, the greatest threat to the iron components is rust, caused by high humidity levels or improper handling of the objects. For the wooden shafts and leather, on the other hand, low humidity is a problem. Nowadays, a team of three restorers works to ensure optimum conservation of the exhibits.



In 1652, the Styrian estates ordered this mortar from the Graz gun foundry of Conrad Seiser. It bears the Styrian panther, the heraldic animal of its purchasers.



Two pulleys mounted in the attic of the armoury were used for storing and transporting the military equipment. These were capable of moving large baskets filled with weapons.



Due to their weight of up to 32 kilograms, 'Doppelhaken' wall guns were fired from walls or through slits.



Bayonets are blades that were either stuck inside the barrel or slid onto a fixture next to the muzzle so that the gun could also be used as a stabbing weapon.



Further technical developments in firearms led to specialisations in production. Locksmith, gunsmith and stockmaker all worked hand in hand. The numerous small private gun-making workshops of the 16th century were later replaced by large producers in Ferlach, Deutschfeistritz, Trautenfels and Steyr during the 17th century.



The purchase, storage and distribution of weapons were the responsibility of the warders of the arms. The scales depicted here were used by the warders to weigh the arms, gunpowder and bullets on delivery, since these were paid for according to weight rather than per item.

2nd Floor: Helmets, Suits of Armour and Pistols

On the second floor you will find mainly suits of armour, designed according to the needs of different corps. What was known as the 'heavy' cavalry wore a 'cuirass' that reached down to the knee. The 'light' cavalry were protected by a 'Trabharnisch', or harquebusier's armour, which had no short tassets. The 'deutsche Knechte' foot soldiers wore special Landsknecht armour.



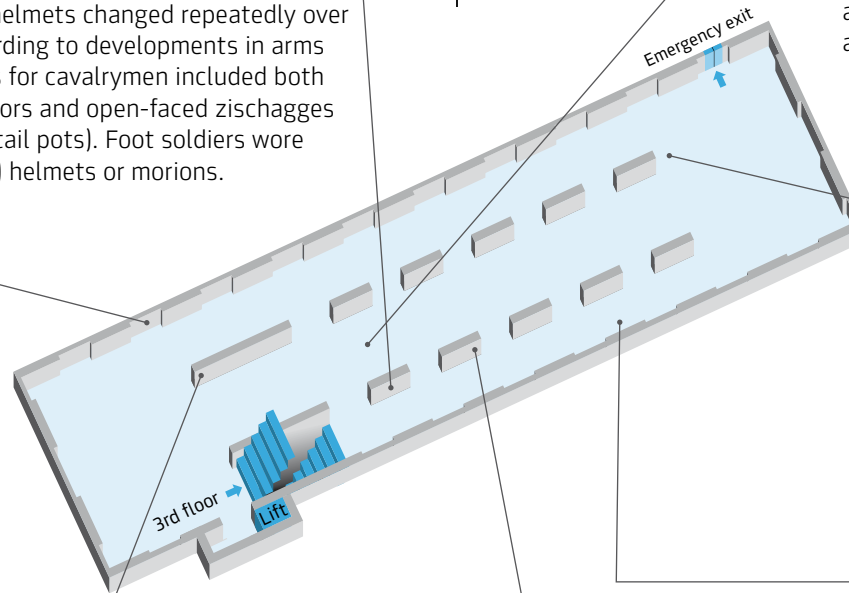
The type and shape of helmets changed repeatedly over the course of time according to developments in arms technology. The designs for cavalymen included both completely enclosed visors and open-faced zischaggas (also known as lobster-tail pots). Foot soldiers wore 'Sturmhaube' (burgonet) helmets or morions.



Many of the pistols designed for higher officers are richly ornamented. The decoration on these weapons is not made from ivory, but instead of inlay formed from cattle bones. A large number of these wheel-lock weapons have a distinctive ball-shaped pommel. Known as 'puffers', these were brought to Graz from Nuremberg in the last third of the 16th century.



Hussars were lightly equipped horsemen who wore a close-meshed mail shirt and plate armour: the breast and backplate of this armour consisted of many iron rings bound together with leather straps and rivets so that the horseman remained agile.



Up until the mid-17th century, the heavy cavalry formed the elite of the Styrian mounted militia. Although their suits of armour had the disadvantage of weighing up to 25 kilos, the visor helmet, collar, brassards, breastplate and backplate, gauntlets and also short tassets reaching to the knee offered superior protection. The relatively small size of the armour is explained by the fact that it was made for an average body height of 160-165 cm.



Wheel-lock pistols belonged to the equipment of both the heavy cavalry and the harquebusiers. These were kept in leather holsters that were attached to the horses' saddles.



The producers of this kind of equipment were known as plate armourers. They used special tools to shape sheet metal into the individual pieces of armour and then linked them with leather straps and rivets.



The Styrian estates employed various incentives—including tax exemption—to attract the best plate armourers to Graz. One of these was Israel Burckhart from Augsburg, who came to the city in 1571. When the heavily indebted Burckhart later fled Graz, his wife was forced to run the workshop herself in order to repay her husband's creditors. Since part of the cost for nearly all of the armour she produced was withheld in order to pay back Burckhart's debts, Regina Burckhart needed to supply a lot of armour. Much of the harquebusier's armour preserved here was produced by her.

3rd Floor: Firing tests, hallmarks and horse's armour

The third floor mainly houses armour originating from German workshops. The imperial estates were prepared to offer financial assistance supporting Inner Austria in its struggles with the Ottoman Empire. This aid, however, was conditional on the required military equipment being purchased from German centres of weapon production. Hence the second half of the 16th century saw brisk trade with Augsburg, Nuremberg und Suhl. Another focus of the third storey is the equestrian armour made for nobles, and also equipment for tournaments.



Many expressions in the English language originated from combat. The phrase full tilt means 'at top speed', 'with maximum force'. This comes from the part of the tournament known as jousting, which was once called tilting, where two knights on horseback charge at each other with lances and try to knock the other off his horse.



Armour produced especially for horses is valuable. In 1814, Karl Graf von Stubenberg donated this suit—which weighs roughly 42 kilos—to the Joanneum. The armour is thought to have been made by the Innsbruck plate armourer Konrad Seusenhofer, while the decoration is attributed to the Augsburg etcher Daniel Hopfer.

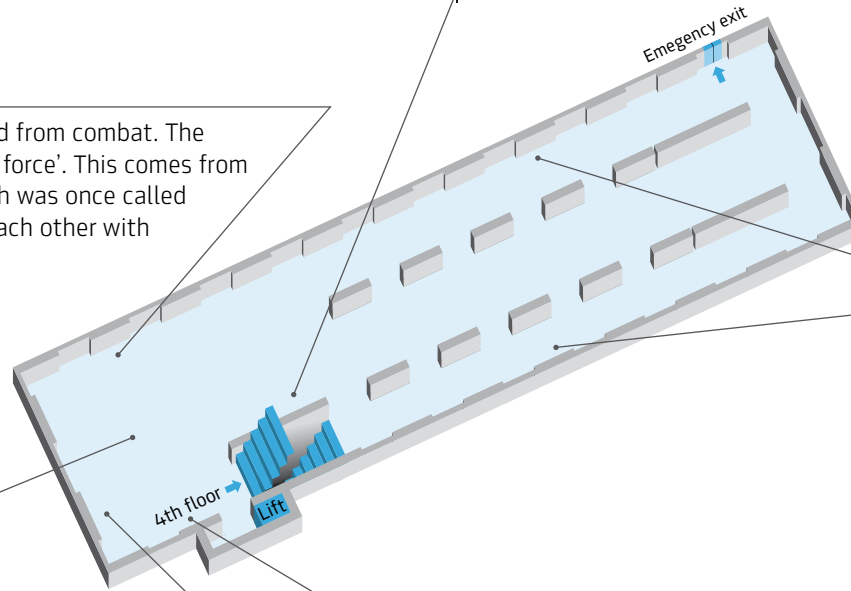


These coats of 'Riefelharnisch' or 'fluted' armour are among some of the oldest pieces in the armoury, appearing in an inventory dated 1557. The device of 'fluting' gave the relatively thin armour plate metal of the early 16th century greater strength, at the same time providing a fashionable look.



On his tomb at the abbey of Stift Seckau, the ruler of Inner Austria, Karl II, is depicted in full armour. The original armour can be found today in the Landeszeughaus. It was made by the Augsburg plate armourer Conrad Richter, who had been brought to Graz by the Styrian estates on the strength of his outstanding reputation.

Many coats of armour and helmets bear dents that can be traced back to firing tests: in order to check the quality of the equipment purchased, various individual components were chosen from among a range of armour delivered to the armoury. These were then shot at with pistols from a distance of ten to twelve metres. If the bullets failed to penetrate the armour being tested, then the whole range would be bought. Otherwise, the plate armourer would have to provide replacements at his own cost.



Some armour bears the hallmarks of the south German production centres of Nuremberg and Augsburg. These marks were regarded as a reliable proof of quality and superseded the requirement for tests.



4th Floor: Morning stars, Halberds and Chevaux-de-Frise

Before the advent of firearms, edged weapons and staff weapons dominated warfare during this era. For a long time, staff weapons such as halberds, pikes and morning stars were the chief weapons used by foot soldiers, while the horsemen preferred edged weapons such as swords and sabres. As their penetration force increased, guns gradually replaced staff weapons on the battlefield, yet staff weapons remained in use as symbolic items of prestige—as guard weapons, for example. It was the same case for edged weapons, which came principally to signify status in the imperial civil service.



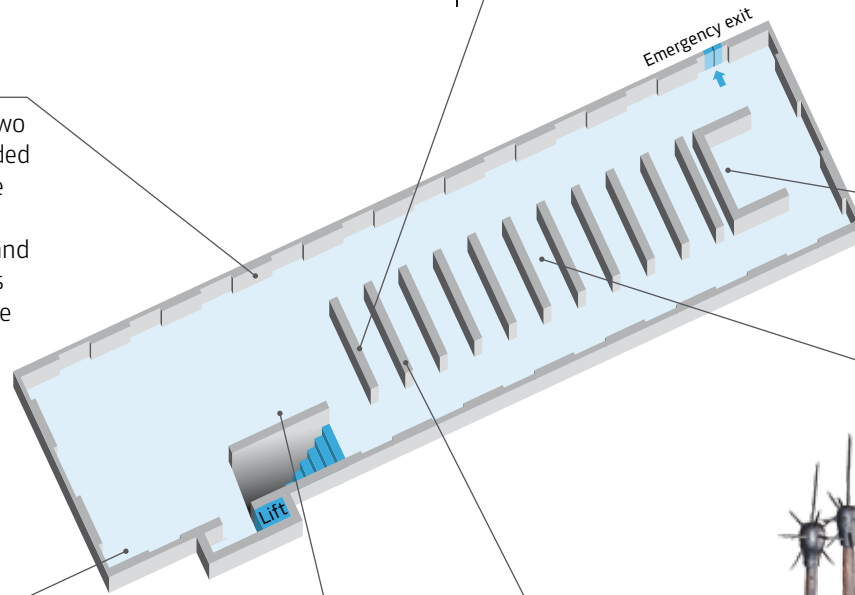
The production of edged weapons had to balance two contradictory aims: on the one hand, the blades needed to be hard in order to prevent rapid blunting; on the other hand, they had to be flexible enough to stop them breaking. This was the art of bladesmithing, and today you will still find the hallmark of bladesmiths on nearly all of the swords, sabres and rapiers in the armoury.



'Two-handed' swords were used to break through the enemy's ranks of pikes. Because of their length of up to two metres they had to be wielded with both hands, meaning that the soldiers who carried them required specially training, but also received better payment.



Developments in weapons changed the tactics of war and led, for example, to the infantry becoming more important: these rotella shields—which weigh up to 15 kilos—were intended to protect infantry units from bullets.



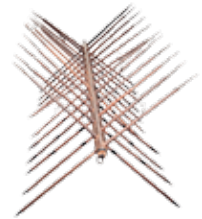
Many of the staff weapons stored in the armoury originate from Upper Austrian workshops and were transported to Graz on wagons that passed through several toll stations on their way. Because these consignments of pikes and halberds were considered vital to the war effort, the estates obtained letters of passage from the Prince Regnant for the suppliers so that they could avoid the usual toll charges.



The intricate etched decorations on these staff weapons are an indication of their users' standing. The first step in the etching process is to cover the iron surface with an acid-resistant material such as wax. An etching needle is then used to scratch out the desired image, which then has acid washed over it. Once the acid-resistant layer has been removed, the design is then blackened.



In 1683, Vienna was besieged by the army of the Turkish Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa. The Styrian estates perceived a threat to the northern and eastern borders of Styria, and thus both well-armed enlisted mercenaries and peasant subjects were conscripted to protect the border. With little experience of battle, these men were equipped with morning stars: clubs covered in iron spikes fixed onto wooden poles.



The cheval-de-frise was a barricade consisting of a cross bar pierced in many places and covered with projecting spikes. The chevaux-de-frise shown here were used as a defence against cavalry attacks, for blocking roads and bridges or for protecting a camp ground.

The Architecture of the Landeszeughaus

In the early modern period the 'Zeughaus' or armoury evolved as a special type of building, and referred to functional architectural designs that at first held only guns, then later came to house all kinds of weapons and armour. The arrangement of military equipment in an armoury followed practical criteria and was aimed at a maximum use of space. Thus the heavy guns and all their paraphernalia were always stored on the ground floor, while the equipment for the infantry and cavalry was positioned on the upper floors, on shelves, gun racks, ceilings and walls depending on its category. Designed as an austere, functional building, the Graz regional armoury was only covered in prestigious ornamentation on its Herrengasse façade: artistic elements include the panther as an emblem of Styria and the crests of the five representatives entrusted with the construction of the armoury. In the niches either side of the gateway stand the gods Mars and Minerva, embodying readiness for battle.