

Ashland Maille Shirt

15th Century - Western European

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Design

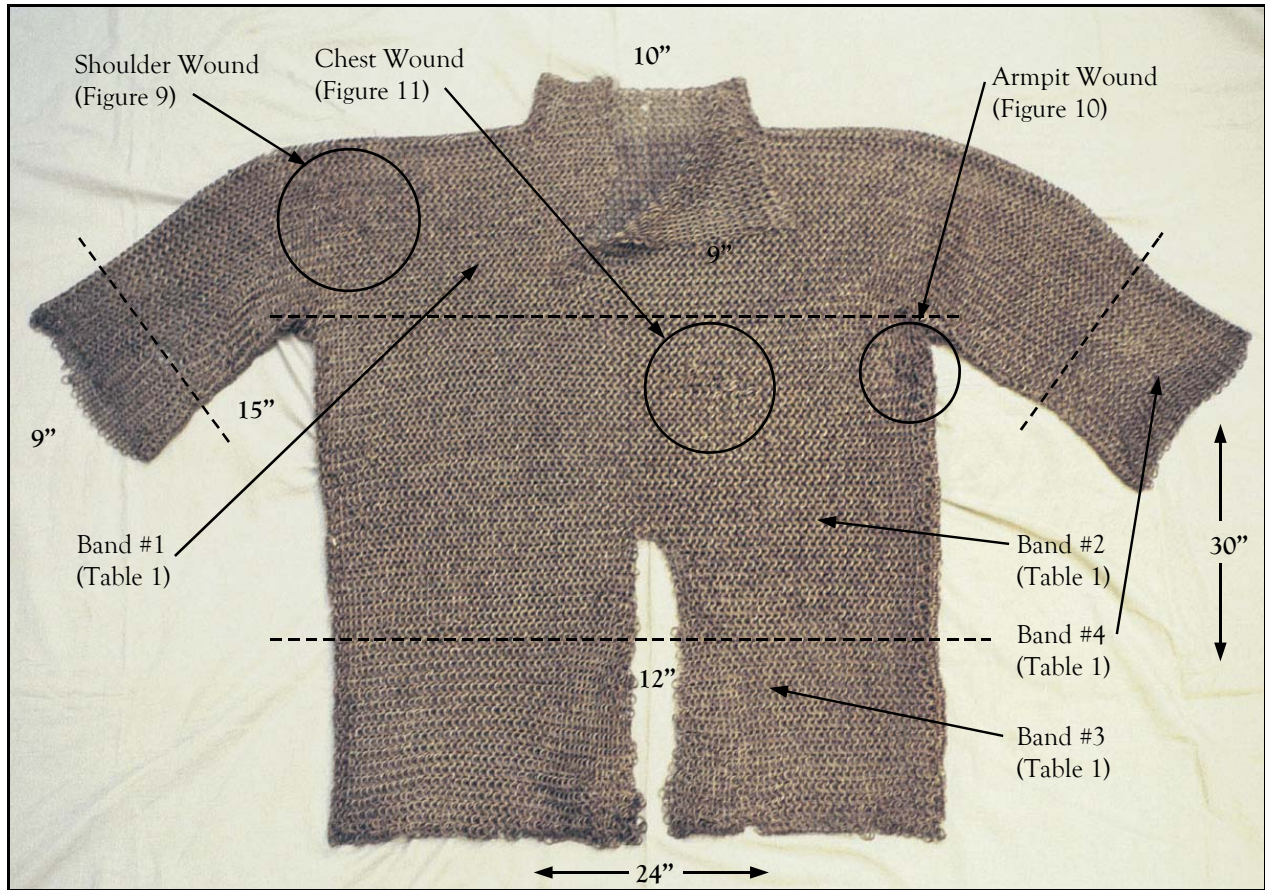


Figure 1. Maillle shirt pattern

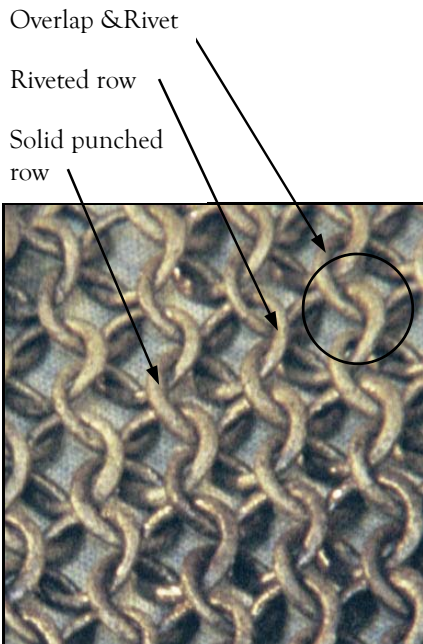


Figure 2. Back of rings

With the kind permission of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Oregon, I was allowed to survey this maille shirt in 2003. The shirt is made up of alternating rows of riveted and punched links. Split in the front and back, this was designed for use on horseback. The neck has an overlapping V design which would have been laced up snug to the body. (figure 16) There are three distinct bands of ring size and gage from heavy at the shoulders, to light at the thighs and arms. (table 1 & figure 15) At 47 pounds, this is a massive, highly protective shirt with a very dense weave.

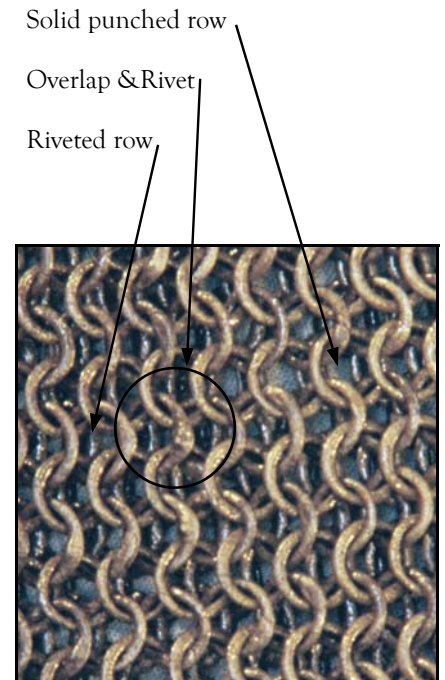


Figure 1. Front of rings

Details

Link #	OD1	OD2	ID1	ID2	Lap1	Lap2	Mound Height	Thick-ness A	Width A	Thick-ness B	Width B	Thick-ness C	Width C
Band 1 Riveted	.490"	.470"	.350"	.310"	.210"	.110"	.080"	.070" (15g)	.080" (14g)	.070" (15g)	.080" (14g)	.060" (16g)	.080" (14g)
Band 1 Solid	.440"	.450"	.320"	.320"	N/A	N/A	N/A	.070" (15g)	.070" (15g)	.070" (15g)	.070" (15g)	.070" (15g)	.070" (15g)
Band 2 Riveted	.481"	.495"	.340"	.330"	.220"	.110"	.090"	.060" (16g)	.070" (15g)	.060" (16g)	.080" (14g)	.060" (16g)	.060" (16g)
Band 2 Solid	.480"	.480"	.320"	.320"	N/A	N/A	N/A	.080" (14g)	.080" (14g)	.080" (14g)	.080" (14g)	.080" (14g)	.080" (14g)
Band 3 Riveted	.448"	.425"	.309"	.271"	.230"	.090"	.071"	.051" (17g)	.061" (16g)	.050" (17g)	.065" (16g)	.051" (17g)	.065" (16g)
Band 3 Solid	.440"	.440"	.321"	.321"	N/A	N/A	N/A	.051" (17g)	.060" (16g)	.060" (16g)	.060" (16g)	.060" (16g)	.060" (16g)
Band 4 Riveted	.440"	.450"	.320"	.280"	.180"	.110"	.080"	.060" (16g)	.070" (15g)	.050" (17g)	.070" (15g)	.060" (16g)	.070" (15g)
Band 4 Solid	.420"	.420"	.310"	.310"	N/A	N/A	N/A	.070" (15g)	.060" (16g)	.070" (15g)	.070" (15g)	.070" (15g)	.060" (16g)

Table 1.

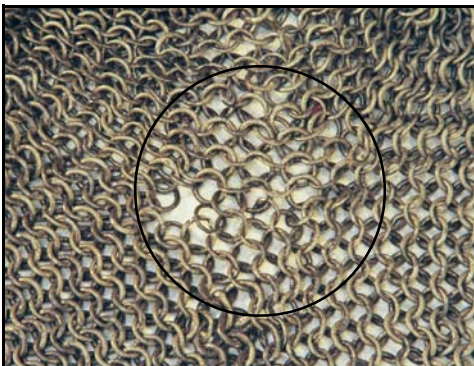
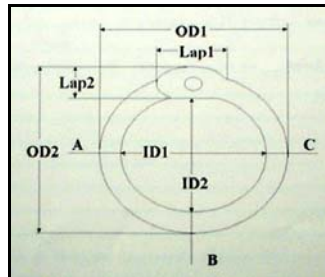


Figure 4. Armpit

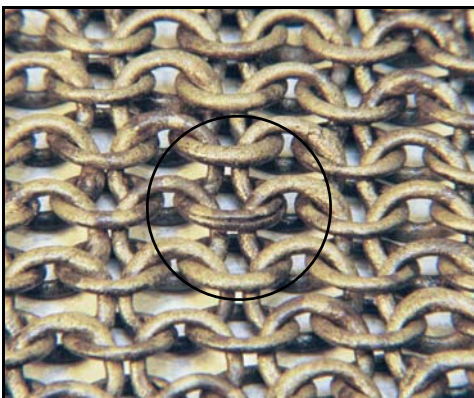


Figure 5. Groove made while drawing the wire

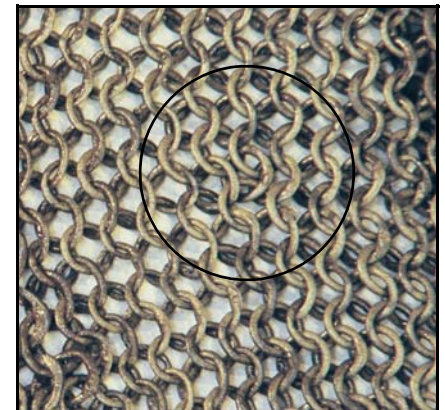


Figure 6. Expansion row

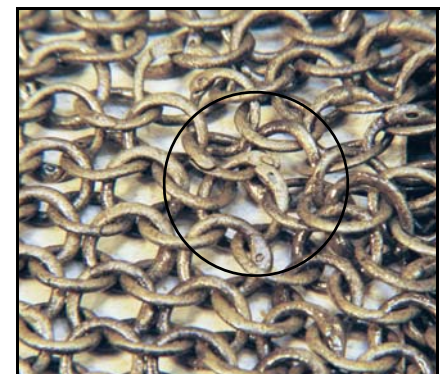


Figure 7. Flattened ring with wedge rivet

The origin of this shirt can be determined by the style of the rivet. The use of the wedge shape rivet (figure 7), instead of the round rivet, places the creation of this shirt in western Europe. Comparing similar flattened rings with wedge shaped rivets (figure 12), my assumption is that it is from the 15th century. The weave design of this shirt uses standard expansion rows (figure 6) to tailor the chest and taper the arms. The armpit uses a 90 degree weave change, common to 15th century shirts. (figure 4)

Wounds / Repairs

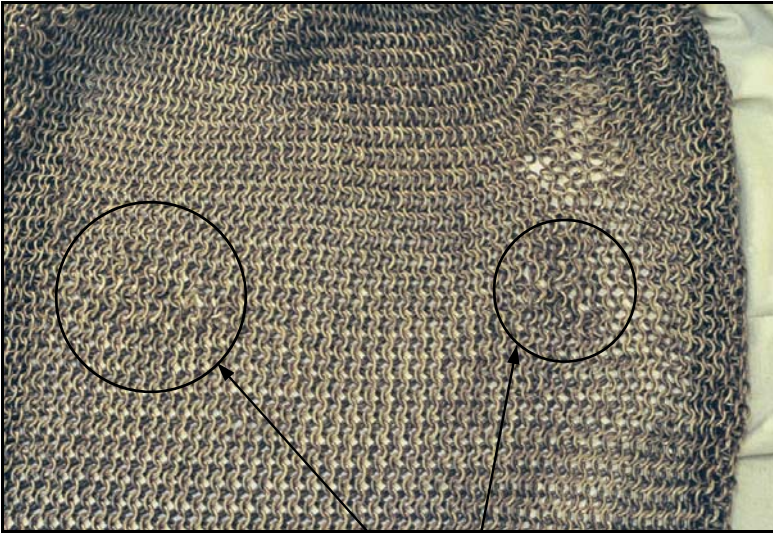


Figure 8. Wound path

Armpit Wound (Figure 9)

Chest Wound (Figure 11)

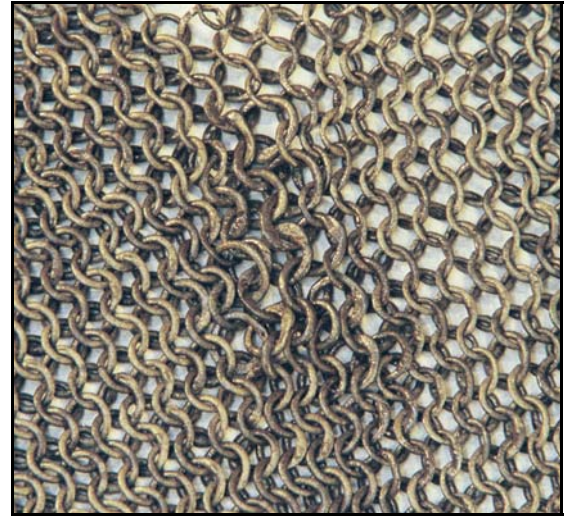


Figure 9. Armpit Wound

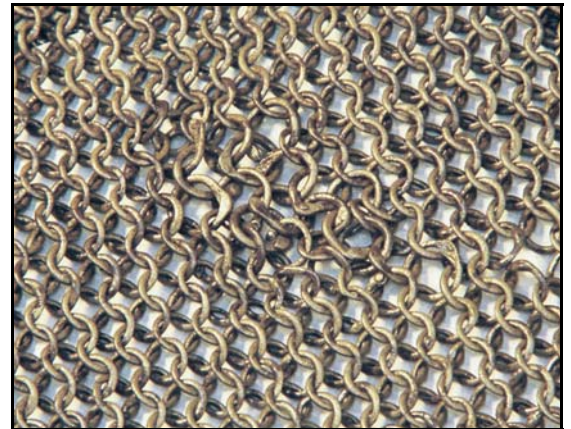


Figure 10. Shoulder wound

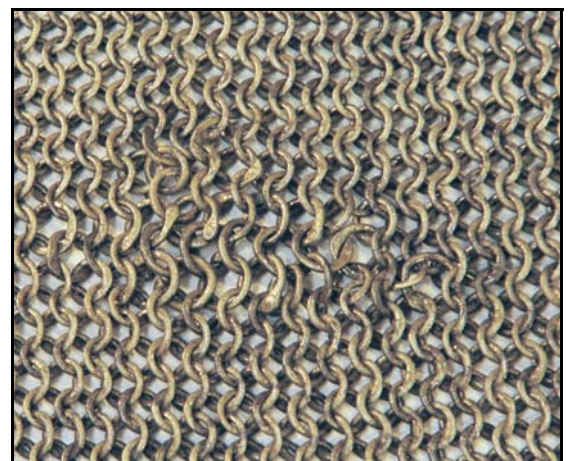


Figure 11. Chest wound

The place where this shirt is believed to have been found is outside of Kuwait in a fortification ruin (early 1900s). This seems an odd place to find a 15th century western European shirt of maille, but one piece of evidence supports the story. There are three repairs that have been done to what looks like mortal battlefield wounds. The first is a cut across the right shoulder about 8" long, the second is a 3" diameter hole in the chest just off center to the sternum, and the third is a 2" diameter hole just below the left armpit. The second and third appear to indicate that the wearer was run through. All three holes have been repaired, seemingly by the same hand, with various size and gage rings, all using a round rivet style. This rivet style is commonly associated with Eastern maille (figure 14). These rings are also round in cross section, which is a typical Eastern detail, unlike the rest of the piece, which use flattened links.

With the little evidence that I have, my conclusion is that this shirt belonged to a 15 century crusader that traveled to the middle East. There he met his demise by having his sword arm disabled and then being run through. The shirt was then salvaged and repaired in the field (because of the low quality and consistency of the rings) and reused until it was found in the abandoned fortification.

Similar Period Examples



Figure 12. Maille coif front. 15th Century (Sheldon)
Slightly flattened with wedge rivet and small dome.



Figure 13. Maille coif back. 15th Century (Sheldon)
Back of wedge rivet, barely discernible rectangular rivet back.



Figure 14. Eastern Style Ring. 15th Century (Schmid)
Round wire with only overlap flattened and round rivet with domes on both sides



Figure 15. Maille Shirt. 15th Century (Hermann Historica)
Alternating rows of riveted and solid punched rings with 3 bands of gage thickness, heavy on the shoulders to lighter at the legs and arms.



Figure 16. Maille Shirt. 15th Century (Sotherby's)
30" long shirt with alternating rows of riveted and solid punched rings. Split in front and back and overlapping V neck.

Bibliography

1. Hermann Historica. "A heavy coat of mail, European 15th/16th century" www.hermann-historica.de. Auction 48, lot 3429.
2. Schmid, Erik D. "Link Details from Articles of Mail in the Wallace Collection" [The Journal of The Mail Research Society](#) volume 1, No. 1 (2003): 2-20.
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