

# Oxford Sword & Staff Equipment Guide - October 2023

This guide is intended to help those new to HEMA, or those deciding on what to get next. If you're new to the club and have no gear at all, don't worry about reading this guide yet - just show up in comfortable clothes and we'll lend you anything you need for your first few sessions.

[The first part](#) is a rough schedule of what to buy in what order, based on increasing intensity of training and fighting. You won't necessarily get everything in this order, but you won't go far wrong if you do. [The second part](#) is a list of suppliers, and recommendations for specific products.

This guide is initially aimed at what's needed for longsword, since there's a longsword session every week and that's where everyone starts. However, there are also recommendations for trainers for the other weapons we study. As for protective gear, if you have enough for longsword, you have enough for everything else we do.

If you have any additional questions on the subject, the best thing to do is either ask at one of our training sessions, or on the Whatsapp group.

## Part 1: What to get...

### ...for drilling

- **Mask**. Necessary for almost any paired drill, and sparring of course. So protect your head! There are two standards, CEN 1 and CEN 2. Many tournaments require CEN 2.
- **Gloves**. As above. Avoid broken fingers.
- **Longsword**. Some regular members have spares, but it's a good idea to get your own as soon as possible. That way you can avoid disappointment at training, and practise at home!

### ...for low intensity club sparring

- **Jacket**. Protects against sharp points in the case of a steel sword breaking (look for a Newton rating of at least 350N), and provides padding to reduce pain and risk of injury from all kinds of hits - particularly thrusts to the chest. Make sure to get one with a blade catcher pocket on the throat.
- **Gorget**. Protect Ya Neck (Wu Tang Clan, 1992). Masks have bibs and jackets have blade catchers, but don't rely on them - nothing beats a rigid plate in front of your throat.

- [Groin protector](#). Essential for some. Less essential for others.
- [Plastic chest protector](#). A thrust to the solar plexus, even through a jacket, really hurts. Not mandatory but is a good idea.
- [Mask overlay/Back of head protection](#). Again, recommended for low intensity, essential for heavy. Fencing masks do not provide enough protection against a full speed steel feder to the back of the head.
- [Joint protection](#). Elbows and knees. Good idea for low intensity, essential for heavy. Broken knees are no fun. It's important that the knee protection covers the sides as well as the front!

...for high intensity club sparring and tournaments

- [Forearm and shin guards](#). When the steel is really flying, hard hits to the forearms or shins can take you out of the fight. Many tournaments require these.
- [Breeches](#). Provides puncture protection in the same way as jackets (at least 350N, as with jackets), and may have padding as well. Also, can be worn with your choice of knee socks in club colours or with cool and witty designs.
- [Socks](#). Most tournaments will require no visible flesh on show so long knee length socks

...for getting involved with other weapons

- [Staff](#). This is a type of long stick. You hit people with it.
- [Dagger](#). Pointy. Stabby. Specifically, we use the medieval rondel dagger.
- [Dussack](#). A short, somewhat curved sword with a closed hilt.
- [Rapier/Sidesword](#). A straight, single-handed sword with a complex hilt and *tons of style*.

## Part 2: Recommendations

This section is to help you navigate the large and increasing number of options for HEMA gear. These recommendations are not intended as the be all and end all; they are some good options that have been around for some time, and are tried and tested by the community. This list is therefore not comprehensive - if something isn't on the list, it doesn't mean it's not good! Feel free to ask questions if you want to order off-menu.

There are also some 'starter kit' suggestions. These are cheap, quick to ship items that are sufficient at lower levels, but will eventually need replacing as you progress.

To start with, a list of suppliers, with the country they're based in, and a description of what they sell. Where known, shipping rates to the UK are included. For suppliers with pricey shipping, it's always worth asking if anyone else in the club wants to order at the same time for shared postage.

## Suppliers

N.B. Thanks to past choices, ordering anything from outside of the UK is going to attract both import tax and VAT as well as shipping. Do consider this when figuring out the total cost of ordering overseas.

- [Academy of Historical Arts Shop](#). UK. Our parent organisation! Distributor for a variety of brands (as well as several excellent books). AHA member discount on a wide range of items.
- [The HEMA Shop](#). UK. Distributor for SPES. We get good discounts with them on their own branded gear, Red Dragon. Shipping £8.
- [Tempus Fugitives](#). UK. Distributor for Kvetun, Malleus Martialis, and Bloss. Good for avoiding faff with customs and shipping charges!
- [Black Armoury](#). France. Distributor for several brands, including Regenyei and Destroyer Modz. Small own brand line; generally good stuff. Shipping €20+.
- [Faits d'Armes](#). France. Distributor for several brands, including Regenyei and Black Fencer. Shipping €16.50.
- [SPES](#). Poland. Long standing manufacturer of some of the most reliable gear in HEMA. Shipping €25+.
- [Faceless Fencer](#). UK. Forged in the crucible of our very own club, FF is a maker of quality rubber dussacks.
- [Destroyer Modz](#). USA. Cool, generally well-made protective gear, "by fighters for fighters". Shipping \$75+ (order from Black Armoury!).
- [Leon Paul](#). UK. One of the best sport fencing brands for decades; LP has partnered with SPES to produce a line of HEMA gear. Shipping £10.
- [Allstar](#). UK. Sport fencing brand with good masks.
- [PBT](#). Hungary. Sport fencing brand with a decent HEMA range.
- [Gajardoni](#). Italy. Super stylish protective gear.
- [Sparring Gloves](#). Poland. Manufacturer of Sparring Gloves (duh).
- [Regenyei Armory](#). Hungary. Manufacturer of swords.
- [Ensifer](#). Poland. Also manufacturer of swords.
- [Kvetun Armoury](#). Russia. Manufacturer of more swords (also protectors).
- [Black Fencer](#). Spain. Manufacturer of a wide range of different synthetic weapons, and a growing range of steel swords. Shipping €25+
- [THOKK](#) Manufacturer of sparring gloves

## A Note of Protection, Ratings and Newtons

You will see maybe ratings, numbers and force ratings on fencing kit so it's worth a short introduction to what these mean. It's worth separating these into two lines of thought:

- Ratings. These can be Newton/force ratings (350N, 800N etc.) or CEN rating (CEN1, CEN2 etc). These correspond to a testable number that the product meets. For a jacket, this means the force a certain shaped point needs to pierce is. For a mask this is the force needed to either pierce the bib (fabric bit at the bottom) or break the

mesh (note this is break, NOT deform). For fabric specifically this can be broadly thought of as the resistance to a sharp thing (a broken sword for example) piercing the object. This is not necessarily how much it will reduce impact/provide cushioning. The Newton rating for fabric elements (e.g. bib, jacket, trousers etc) is created through layering cloth and then doing a Drop Test. For instance the arms of a Spes AP Jacket 350N are 2 layers of canvas, a layer of packing blanket and then a liner fabric.

- Padding/impact protection - This normally not given a number rating, and will depend on the product and manufacturer, and can be chosen to your taste. For example a jacket's forearm will have a Newton rating, but this is unlikely to be sufficiently padded to make cuts to the arm with a feder be comfortable. An additional (non-Newton rated) forearm guard provides additional impact protection which means you now have **a jacket which resists puncturing**, and **forearm guards which reduce pain, bruising** and other things that can make this activity unfun and dangerous

Sometimes equipment provides both a newton rating and impact resistance (for example some gloves or fencing masks), but again please ask.

Some common terms you'll see:

- 350N/800N. Most often seen on fencing jackets or fencing trousers; these are standard ratings for puncture resistance. **You should be getting a minimum 350N jacket (this will be mandatory for any tournament)**. Normally 800N jackets have more padding, but this isn't always the case (see the 800N AP Light by SPES for example)
- CEN1 - This is a rating for fencing masks. This means the mesh has a Newton rating of 600N, and the bib a rating of 350N
- CEN2 - This is a rating for fencing masks. This means the mesh has a Newton rating of 1000N, and the bib a rating of 1600N. Note the mesh rating does not necessarily mean the mesh more strongly resists deformation.

For some supplementary info

<https://www.keithfarrell.net/blog/2017/09/difference-350n-fencing-mask-1600n-fencing-mask/>

## Longsword

What we're all here for! Due to the club having a reasonable quantity of foam practice swords, you should absolutely not feel you need to get a sword right away. Try stuff at the club, borrow and generally get a feel before investing.

**If you want a sword right away to practice/display magnificently: Red Dragon Synthetic Longsword (The HEMA Shop) £35 (with club discount) + shipping**

Great for starting with, because it's so cheap. Be aware, though, that the weight and handling characteristics of these are not good analogues for steel, so if you're happy to commit to the hobby it might be best to go straight for a feder.

**If you want your own foam longsword: HEMA Heavy Padded Flat Blade Sword from the HEMA shop. £50 plus shipping**

A good practice sword if you want to do low gear sparring with some intensity. Approximately the same length as a longsword and has some profiling.

**Recommendation: Longsword Feder (Regenyei Armory) £279 from the HEMA shop, €230 + VAT + Import tax + shipping from Regenyei**

Good price, good handling, good safety and good durability. These are the gold standard in HEMA for a reason. Regenyei offers a number of customisation options on his feders, such as hilt and blade length, grip material and colour. You'll see a lot of these around the club, so feel free to ask to try out different configurations and work out what suits you best. The standard model is also available from Faits d'Armes, with a shorter shipping time.

**Alternatives:**

Ensifer feders - durable, slightly shorter and heavier than Regenyei as standard, which gives good presence in the bind.

Kvetun Armoury feders - none in the club at present, but very well reviewed online.

(There are many more manufacturers of feders, so feel free to ask about others. To save you time - Kingston Arms and Hanwei feders are not safe to fence with.)

## Mask

**Starter: Red Dragon HEMA Fencing Mask CEN 1 (The HEMA Shop) £63 (with club discount) + shipping**

Will see you all the way up from drilling to fairly intensive sparring.

**Recommendation: Allstar Fencing Coaching Mask CEN 2 (Allstar UK) £159 + shipping**

Very durable mask, will be permitted gear for any tournament.

**Alternatives:**

Leon Paul MFA Tournament Mask, purely because I want someone to show up one day wearing that piece of insanity.

Gajardoni - expensive, but very good.

PBT.

## Gloves

**Starter: Red Dragon HEMA Sparring Gloves (The HEMA Shop) £54 (with club discount) + shipping**

Despite the name, these are unsuitable for anything but drilling or low intensity sparring with longswords. They're pretty good for those activities, however, and they can be suitable for sparring with some complex-hilted swords.

**Recommendation: Sparring Gloves Mittens (Sparring Gloves) €160 + shipping**

Great all round for protection, with a nice lightweight profile and decent dexterity. Available with an extended cuff which can be used in place of forearm guards, or an hourglass wrist if you want separate forearm protectors.

**SPES Lobster Heavy Sparring Gloves (The HEMA Shop) £162.65 +shipping**

bulky as hell, but no better protection out there as long as you get the added fingertip protectors.

**SPES Lobster Heavy Full Thumb Sparring Gloves (The HEMA Shop) £181.00 + shipping** bulky as hell, but no better protection out there as now with added fingertip protectors.

**THOKK Weaponmaster Gauntlets pro (THOKK) €229 + shipping**

Probably the pinnacle of gloves for single handed weapons. Robust, will fit in most sword handles and slowly getting more available.

**Alternatives:**

HF Armoury Gabriel - Similar level of protection to the SPES Heavies, slimmer and with better thumb and wrist protection

## Jacket

**Recommendation: AP Plus Fencing Jacket (SPES) £191 + shipping (The HEMA Shop) (Women's cut jacket is same/similar price)**

Padding all over, blade catcher on the throat, front zip. No muss, no fuss. Can also be ordered at a higher cost with customisation on size, colour etc.

**Alternatives:**

SPES AP Light Plus - less padding all over, but has removable/moddable protective inserts in certain areas. Much lighter and cooler to fence in than the classic AP, and machine washable! Protection may need beefing up with modular padding for really heavy sparring/tournament use. Any of the other SPES jackets are also fine provided they have a zip closure

Red Dragon jackets - Same as SPES

Black Armoury - has a big, big collar for Protect(ing) Ya Neck (Wu Tang Clan, 1992)

## Gorget

**Recommendation: ARCEM mini-gorget €32 + shipping (Black Armoury)**

Comfortable, super minimalist and lightweight, but does the job well and can be modded to fit with a hairdryer and a pair of scissors.

**Alternatives:**

Leon Paul - beefy. All ABS construction. Pricey!

Red Dragon - good, rigid protector, can't go wrong with it. (HEMA SHOP)

**£20+discount+shipping**

Winter Tree Crafts - leather and steel construction. Very cool.  
Balefire Blades - another cool leather one.

## Groin Protector

**Recommended:** Pretty much any rigid sporting groin protector.

## Chest Protector (Sized)

**Recommendation (when it's released): Cryptid Combatwear Chest Protector**

## Chest Protector (Unsize)

**Recommendation: Chest Protector OR Extended Chest Protector (PBT) €25.01-€31.75 + shipping**

It's a rigid piece of plastic that goes over your chest. The extended version has an extra piece that extends over the stomach.

Recommendation: **ECONOGUARD WOMENS CHEST PROTECTOR (Leon Paul) £40.4 + shipping**. In terms of shaped chest protectors, this is one of the better options.

**Alternatives:**

Leon Paul, or really any sport fencing supplier.

## Elbow Protection

**Recommendation: Shell Elbow Protectors (SPES) (£51.65 with Vectir forearm guards or £51 with Geko) + shipping (The HEMA Shop)**

Can be attached to SPES jackets, for more secure protection.

**Alternatives:**

Kvetun Armoury - good solid plastic protectors, can also come with forearm protection.

## Knee Protection

**Recommendation: Red Dragon HEMA Knee & Shin Protectors (The HEMA Shop) £38 (with club discount) + shipping**

They take up a lot of bag space, but they're tough and provide good coverage with good mobility.

**SPES HEMA Shell knee Protectors (HEMA Shop) £19.00 + SPES Vectir Lower leg protector (HEMA Shop) £42.50** - Less protection than the red dragons but fold down to a much smaller space

**Alternatives:**

UltraFlex KneePro - if you can get them in the UK for £30 or less, these are great.

Kvetun Armoury - great protection for the whole leg, and look really cool.

You can also get breeches with built-in knee protectors, but bear in mind that these may not conform closely to the knee, which may lead to gaps as you move.

## Mask Overlay/Back of Head Protection

### **Recommendation: Unity Pro Overlay (SPES) £66 + shipping (The HEMA Shop)**

Necessary extra padding on top of the mask, very necessary rigid plates on the back of the head and neck.

### **Alternatives:**

Red Dragon overlay (The HEMA Shop)

Note overlays with a built in neck guard (like the SPES Trinity) should be used with caution, they can be very difficult to fit properly on a mask.

## Forearm Guards

### **Recommendation: ARCEM mini forearms €35 + shipping (Black Armoury)**

If you don't get one of the above forearm & elbow sets, these lovely low-profile guards will fit on or under a jacket.

### **Alternatives:**

SPES Gecko - Flexible and well fitted

SPES Vectir - Can work well, but can be difficult to fit properly

See elbow protection above

## Shin Guards

### **Recommendation: Hockey shin guards £Cheap**

Honestly, if you don't get the Red Dragon knee & shin guards, any decent set of hockey guards will do for shins.

### **Alternatives:**

SPES (See knee protection above)

## Breeches

### **Recommendation: Locust Fencing Pants (SPES) £98.99 + shipping (The HEMA Shop)**

Good broken blade protection, good padding.

### **Alternatives:**

Leon Paul - very similar to SPES

High Hill Pants - EXTREME PUFFINESS

PBT - offers a lightweight elastic option with good mobility, or a heavier pair with built-in padding and knee protection.

## Staff

**Drilling Recommendation: Red Oak Bo Staff ([Playwell](#)) £18.99 + £9.99 shipping (eBay)**



This is our recommendation for drilling and very light sparring. Any higher intensity is too dangerous.

**Sparring Recommendation: Rattan Bo Staff ([Blitz](#)) £19.99 + £6.50 shipping**

These can be used for higher intensity sparring, with the trade-off that they are too light and whippy for drilling, since they don't provide a realistic simulation of the weapon.

**Alternatives:**

Ash is a good alternative to oak.

## Dagger

**Recommendation: Cold Steel Rondel Training Dagger ([Southern Swords](#)) £13 + £8.50 shipping**

Made of polypropylene, these have enough flex to be safe for sparring, without being floppy.

Note: these can be found in various online stores, although stock in the UK can be scarce sometimes. The club does have a number of spares, however!

**Alternatives:**

There are some flexible, safe-tipped steel options out there, but the CS trainers do the job well enough that we think it's not worth spending the extra scratch.

Wood rondels look lovely, but are not safe as they do not flex.

## Dussack

**Recommendation: Faceless Fencer Rubber Dussack £60**

Rugged plastic and rubber construction. Comfortable to use and comfortable to be hit with, as well as being excellent in the bind due to the rubber blade. These can be ordered in the club; just ask one of the club officers.

**Alternatives:**

Black Fencer - Storta, €72 + shipping - based on the Italian cousin of the dussack, these are quite sturdy and handle very well. They are a little stiff, so caution is required when thrusting.

Black Armoury - Arcem Meyer 1570, €110 + shipping - synthetic & leather dussacks based on those depicted in Joachim Meyer's 1570 Art of Combat.

Landsknecht Emporium Dorothea - Only steel dussack on the market. Good flex, historically accurate, what's not to like?