

FACTSHEET 1

The Hunt of the Unicorn tapestry series

- The *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries dating from 1495-1505 are now on display in New York at the Cloisters Museum, which houses the medieval collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art
- The *Hunt of the Unicorn* series is widely accepted as some of the finest Medieval tapestries in the world.
- Inventories dating from the reign of James V show that there were more than 100 tapestries in the royal collection by 1539. Among these is listed a set of six pieces depicting '*the historie of the unicorne*'. This set may have told the same story as the tapestries of the same period which are now in New York.
- The *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries were donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York in 1937 by John D Rockefeller Jr.
- The early history of the tapestries is unknown. It is not until 1680 that they are recorded in any surviving documentation. In that year they appear in the inventory of Francois VI de la Rochefoucauld, a wealthy French duke.
- For the next hundred years, the tapestries remained in the possession of Rouchefoucauld family until they were looted during the uprisings of the French Revolution, when, once again, the tapestries disappear from all records.
- In the 1850s the Count de la Rochefoucauld decided to recover some of his family's lost possessions. He was approached by a peasant woman who claimed she had some curtains covering vegetables in her barn. On investigation, the 'curtains' turned out to be the *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries.
- In 1922 the tapestries were purchased from the family by John D Rockefeller Jr.
- The tapestries tell the story of the hunt and capture of a unicorn but they also contain hidden meanings which can be understood as both a religious story and as a medieval tale.
- It is not known for whom the tapestries were made, although the initials A and E are woven into all seven tapestries. There are also questions about whether they are from the same set: the first and last tapestries have a different style, as does the fifth which survives as two fragments.