

Not the Dark Ages!

Date/Time	Thursdays 8 Jan –5 Feb 2026 11am-1pm	Price	£125 in-person £110 post-event recording
Venue	Lettsom House, 11 Chandos Street, London W1G 9EB NB There is no lift in this building	Lecturer	Dr Sally Dormer

This course is available as both an in person and a recording only event. The recording will be made available to ALL attendees on the Monday following the event and will be available for 4 weeks.

Petrarch, the Italian scholar, used the term “Dark Age” (*saeculum obscurum*), as early as the 1330s, to contrast the dark centuries after the collapse of the Roman Empire with the light of Antiquity. By the 19th century the phrase “Dark Ages” had been adopted by historians and art historians eager to downplay the achievements of the period after the demise of the Roman Empire in Western Europe between 500 and 800. Today this negative, disdainful term has been banished from academic circles, but it persists in general conversation, erroneously suggesting an era characterised by ignorance and incompetence. Each week of this five-week course will be devoted to the craftsmanship of a different group of the non-Roman peoples who settled Western Europe in the 6th-8th centuries, with a particular emphasis on metalwork, to showcase their technical flair, sophistication and cosmopolitan connections. We know less than we would like about the Goths, Merovingian Franks, Lombards and Anglo-Saxons, but there is no doubting their exacting aesthetic standards and superb technical expertise.

Week 1 The Merovingian Franks

Week 2 The Ostrogoths

Week 3 The Lombards

Week 4 The Visigoths

Week 5 The Anglo-Saxons

Dr Sally Dormer is a specialist medieval art historian, with an MA in Medieval Art History and PhD on Medieval illuminated manuscripts from The Courtauld, London University. Sally founded the ongoing V&A Late Medieval Europe and Early Renaissance Year Course 1250-1500 in 1993, and in 2009 devised the V&A Early Medieval Year Course 300-800. She is Director of both. She has lectured for Gresham College, The Arts Society, ARTscapades. From 2000-2020 she was Dean of *European Studies*, a study abroad semester, for two universities in Tennessee, USA.