

Cloth of Gold: The Use of Gold in Royal Couture

The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace

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Hello, and welcome to a podcast from the Royal Collection Trust where we'll be investigating the tradition of using cloth of gold and gold embroidery in royal clothing. Caroline de Guitaut, Senior Curator of Decorative Arts, gives a lecture at the Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, on the application of gold thread, gold embroidery and cloth of gold from 18th century coronation dress up to the glittering embroidery of 20th century royal couture. The images that Caroline refers to in the lecture will appear on the screen of your device.

Caroline de Guitaut: Well, good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. In my lecture today I will be considering royal dress made of cloth of gold, dress embroidered with goldwork embroidery or gold thread, and dress embroidered with gold encrusted and jewelled beads, sequins and crystals. What all these fabrics and embellishments have in common is one element; the glitter and gleam of gold. This lecture relates to the current exhibition here, as Hannah was telling us, in the Queen's Gallery, entitled simply, 'Gold'. The exhibition considers the material of gold in all its forms, including as a textile and an embroidery technique, and although there is only one example of a gold textile in the display, it, together with each of the other exhibits, demonstrates the qualities which make gold such a fascinating and versatile substance. In much the same way that vessels and boxes made of gold in its pure form, or furniture and picture frames gilded with gold leaf, or paintings highlighted with gold pigment convey the richness of the material and also the importance of the subject or owner, gold textiles and their gold embellishments symbolise perhaps more than any other medium of gold in the most visible and immediate way possible, connotations of both wealth and status. Moreover, when the textile is worn by its owner, the movement creates a remarkable play of light and richness not achievable, I would argue, in any of

gold's other media. Within the limitations of the time available today, I cannot cover the entire spectrum of the production and application of gold textiles in royal ownership – that would take several months – so today I will be focussing on a selective but very important group of surviving examples of ceremonial dress, embroidered royal couture, beginning in the mid 18th century and ending in the mid 20th century. All of the dress that we will see this afternoon forms part of the Royal Collection, except where I've indicated it on the slide. So first, let us consider the materials and techniques which are used to create such sumptuous garments and a brief history of their production.

Cloth of gold has its origins in antiquity, in both ancient Rome and Greece where it was considered a fabric befitting of royal status and was often used for ecclesiastical vestments. It continued to be produced in the Byzantine Empire and then in medieval times was primarily produced by Italian weavers. From the end of the 18th century, France became the leading producer of luxury fabrics and eventually in the 19th century these textiles were made in England. From the earliest times it was considered a fabric reserved only for the wealthiest and most important in society, usually royalty or nobility, or the church. And this was also a case of economics because fabrics of silk woven with gold, silver gilt or silver thread were at the top of the pyramid of the richest types of fabric available and were not accessible for financial reasons to anybody other than the court or the church. So how is the fabric made? Well – let me just go back to that previous slide – the fabric is woven with a gold wrapped or spun weft thread. Now these threads cross the width of the loom and interlace with the warp threads. In most cases the thread or yarn is of silk which has itself been wrapped with a band or strip of high content gold filé or wire. The resulting woven fabric has a flexible and yet crisp texture, which you can probably detect from the image, the background of the eagle on the left. But in addition the metallic content can make it incredibly weighty. Different types of metal thread produce different types of effects and textures and these affect their reaction to reflected light. So there's not just one type of gold thread. The cost of the fabrics was not just measured by their gold content and therefore weight, but also by the time taken to weave them. Weaving with metallic thread, which is not as malleable, for example, as silk, had to be undertaken very slowly. In France in the middle of the 18th century, for example, a weaver might make a quarter of an *aune* – now that's the Parisian measure for weaving fabric – per day, and this equates to about a quarter of a metre, compared to two or three metres of a normal satin or silk

without metal thread. So you can see that it's a very slow pace of production and it has to be woven very carefully.

The same fabric used in English court and ceremonial dress that we're going to see was used across the royal courts of Europe during the same period, reaching its greatest refinement between the 16th and 18th centuries. It was essential to the creation of the image of magnificent in the royal courts of France, Vienna, Prussia, Poland and Portugal. And we know from records of production in France in the 18th century that it was reserved only for the highest in society. An early representation of cloth of gold being worn by an English King is seen in the Wilton Diptych, painted between 1395 and 1399. The left panel of the diptych, which we're seeing here, shows Richard II kneeling wearing a robe of cloth of gold and red vermillion, the fabric is decorated apparently with gold embroidery with his personal device of the white hart and sprigs of rosemary, the emblem of his wife, Anne of Bohemia, who had died in 1394. One of the most notable and expansive uses of cloth of gold in the early 16th century was at the meeting between Henry VIII and Francis I of France in June 1520. The aim of the meeting was to encourage England and France as allied forces rather than enemies following the Anglo-French Treaty of 1514. But the meeting is best known for its tournament games and most of all, for its lavish displays of wealth. So much cloth of gold was on display that the site of the meeting was of course named after the material, becoming known as the Field of the Cloth of Gold. As well as tents made of cloth of gold, which you can see in this detail here, the two Kings tried to outdo one another in their dress. Their clothes were made of the finest and most expensive fabrics and embellished with real jewels. On one day alone, on Saturday 17th June, 1520, so contemporary accounts recall, Henry VIII's armour skirt and the decorative elements of his horse armour incorporated no less than 2,000 ounces of gold and 1,100 pearls, the value of which is immense and incalculable really in today's money.

One of the great contradictions of the 16th and 17th century was that royal clothes were often given away as perquisites or benefits to members of the royal household, and yet there were also very strict rules governing which levels of society were allowed to wear which types of textiles. The so-called sumptuary laws provided Tudor monarchs with a means of dictating the clothing worn by the population through legislation which controlled what types of materials, colours and garments could be worn by each rank in society. The laws themselves

actually date back to the early 14th century and were introduced really to maintain social order and also to stimulate the domestic economy by limiting the amount of importation of luxury materials. In England these laws really reached their height during the 16th century under Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. That such legislation was seen as necessary is evidence of the escalating social upheaval in the 16th century with the development of a wealthy and powerful merchant class who could buy expensive clothing in order to imitate their social superiors. The wearing of silver or gold thread and cloth of gold or silver was, as I've said, particularly restricted to specific garments for specific upper ranks of society and of course, primarily for royalty. And once again, we see exactly the same use of these materials across Europe in the royal courts and a similar desire by the rest of the population who could afford to, to emulate this rich court dress.

When we consider royal dress, both ceremonial and fashionable, the greatest concentration by far of the implementation of cloth of gold is seen in ceremonial dress, specifically coronation dress. In the broadest terms, the forms of the garments which constitute the English coronation robes trace their descent from items of civil dress worn in antiquity under the empires of Rome and Constantinople, and more particularly from the ceremonial dress worn by the Emperors and other dignitaries. They're closely related also to church vestments: the tunicle, stole and cope, which are likewise descended from the same Roman sources. The robes used by Charles I and his predecessors were disposed of under the Commonwealth, along with the other coronation regalia, but the designs for the new ones, prepared for the coronations of Charles II, James II were based on living memory of the old ones. And these designs have in turn served as prototypes for later coronation robes, which have often been reused by subsequent monarchs or designed afresh with a nod to contemporary fashion. The earliest surviving robe in the Royal Collection, worn at the coronation, is the Parliamentary Robe made for George III's coronation, which took place on 22nd September 1761. The robe was designed to be worn for his entrance into Westminster Abbey. It is made of red velvet, completed by a large double ermine cape and a train of three and a half metres. Underneath the robe the King wore a surcoat of red velvet with hanging sleeves over a court costume of gold brocade. Prior to the return procession the King went into St Edward's Chapel to put on his Coronation Robe, which was identical to the Parliamentarian Robe that we see here, but made in purple rather than red velvet. The Honourable James Brudenell was Master of the Wardrobe to George III and was responsible for dressing the

King on Coronation Day and as a result it was his job to place the numerous orders to the specialised suppliers for the red and purple velvet and the cloth of gold, and also the lace trimming. And the lace trimming is what we see all around the edge of the robe here, and this actually has a metallic thread in it. The orders were placed with Thomas and William Hinchliffe who were cloth merchants of Covent Garden. The golden lace and the tassels on the robe and the attachments were bought from Mr Barrett, a lace merchant on the Strand. As I've said, this lace does actually have a gold content, although it's almost certainly a silver gilt thread rather than a pure gold thread. The entire cost of the Parliamentary Robe was £1,387 and the robe itself was made by the robe makers, Ede & Ravenscroft, who've made virtually every other coronation robe since the mid 18th century. It was the fashion of the time rather than the tradition that made preference for George III's outfit under his robe. Just showing you a detail of the gold lace that you see there, and this gold lace in fact is exactly the same lace that is used on civil court costume and also on military uniform; although today a fake type of gold lace is used on military uniform, which is called mylar. So under his magnificent robe, and you can see George III here wearing his Coronation Robe, so that's the robe he wore on the exit of the Abbey, the King opted for a splendid court coat made of golden brocade and his shirt was trimmed with Brussels lace. Queen Charlotte wore a robe of cloth of silver and, as was the tradition, the King was anointed during the ceremony beneath a canopy of cloth of gold, held by four Knights of the Garter. There were of course numerous orders for fashionable clothing for the King and Queen made of cloth of gold, cloth of silver or silver gilt, and this included ceremonial dress presented to others, including a costume of the Order of the Garter presented to Czar Alexander I of Russia, which is now in the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. The costume associated with the Order, to be worn under the blue Garter cloak, was created by Charles II under a decree of May 1661, which stated that the modern fashion is always changing and did not contribute to the seriousness and majesty of the Order and that to revalue the dignity and brilliance of the Order, it was necessary to wear a costume in cloth of gold. And it was a variation of this costume that King Charles II wore for his own coronation in 1661.

During the coronation ceremony the monarch is invested by the Archbishop of Canterbury with the attributes of kingship, which of course culminates in the crowning. As part of this investiture, the monarch is clothed in the Coronation Robes, a series of garments, as I said earlier, based on antique and ecclesiastical

sources. At the time of the restoration of the monarchy the medieval vestments were no longer available and new ones had to be made. The task of designing them was entrusted to Sir Edward Walker, who was then Garter King of Arms and he researched the 14th century 'Liber Regalis' which describes the coronation service and provides a format for the ceremony, which has changed little in six centuries and which gave him the information needed to create a new series of robes. From this date the Imperial Mantle was made of cloth of gold. The investiture of robes culminates with the Imperial Mantle, which is this garment we see here; the most richly decorated of all the coronation robes. This mantle, which is also known as the Pallium or Dalmatic, was made for the coronation of George IV in 1821. It incorporates six widths of cloth of gold supplied by the silk mercers, William King and Philip Cooper. The cloth is woven with gold strips, silver thread and light purple silk, and has a detail here, which form a curvilinear lattice pattern of foliage, crowns, fleurs-de-lis and eagles. Brocaded wefts of silk in shades of red, pink and blue and also green form roses, thistles and shamrocks, the national emblems. And the edges are trimmed with a heavy gold bullion fringe. The mantle is fastened over the chest with bands of the same cloth of gold with a gold clasp cast in the form of an eagle, similar to the eagles woven into the fabric. The tailor, John Meyer, who made this robe, charged £24 for making the mantle and the goldsmiths, Rundell, Bridge & Rundell, charged £16.12s for the eagle clasp. The mantle became a perquisite or benefit of Westminster Abbey after the King's coronation, but was presented to the crown in the early 20th century and it was subsequently worn by King George V, King George VI and Her Majesty the Queen at their coronations. Another very similar mantle was made for the coronation of Queen Victoria. This mantle, like the one made for George IV, closely follows the precedent for robes established with the coronation of James II, and this is recorded in Francis Sandford's publication of 1687, a source to which both George IV and Queen Victoria turned for modelling their own coronations. The mantle, as you can see, is virtually identical to that made for George IV, although its front edges are slightly cut away so that the Queen's hands were not obstructed when holding the orb and sceptre. The cloth of gold was woven using the jacquard method, which is a more loosely woven fabric, which provides a crisper pattern and it's strikingly similar, as I've said, to that used at George IV's coronation. The cloth in this case is believed to have been made in Spitalfields. Queen Victoria remarked in her journal that Lord Melbourne thought the robes, and particularly the Imperial Mantle, looked remarkably well, so she was obviously pleased with them. And you can see her here at the

moment of the communion during her coronation – and this painting is actually in the exhibition next door.

Another of the sacred gold garments used at the investiture of the coronation is the supertunica, in which the sovereign is robed following the anointing. The pattern of the supertunica is essentially a long-sleeved man's coat of cloth of gold and it's based on ancient precedent, although in essence follows, as I've said, the cut of a man's coat. The supertunica used for the Queen's coronation in 1953, which we see here, was originally made for the coronation of George V in 1911 and it was made by the robe makers and tailors, Wilkinson & Son of London at a cost of £90. As you can see, it's made of cloth of gold embroidered with goldwork embroidery, and this was carried out by the Ladies' Work Society. The supertunica is worn with a stole, which is a long narrow band of silk fabric, woven with gold thread and gold bullion fringes at both ends, and here you can see a detail of both the goldwork embroidery on the supertunica and also some of the detail of the ends of the stole. The stole worn in 1953 is developed from those worn at the coronations of Charles II, James II, Edward VII and George V and it incorporates embroidered emblems of the crosses of St George, St Andrew and St Patrick, crowns and imperial eagles, the cross keys of St Peter and the national emblems of the United Kingdom and also the emblematic plants of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and Sri Lanka in coloured silk threads.

For her coronation in 1838 Queen Victoria made an innovation for the supertunica which accords more with contemporary fashion and in outline owes something to either legal or academic robes. According to the account of the maker, John Hunter, it was made of – and I quote – 'Rich frosted cloth of gold brocaded with golden coloured silks in devices of palm and the badges of the United Kingdom, the whole bordered with rich gold pillow lace lined with rich crimson satin and a very rich gold girdle with tassels'. It is notable that this garment was much more costly than Queen Victoria's Imperial Mantle. This cost £410 versus £380 for the mantle. And the complete cost of her robes and accessories for the coronation came to more than £3,000. This cost was nonetheless met with the approval of Parliament who kept a very close control on the coronation expenditure, particularly following the lavish excess and exorbitant expense of George IV's coronation 17 years earlier, from which they clearly hadn't quite recovered.

George IV had chosen a cloth of silver doublet and trunk hose lavishly trimmed with gold lace for his coronation, which you see him wearing here, and an embroidered crimson velvet surcoat to wear beneath his Coronation Robes. You can see that his robes are really quite different. His Parliamentary Robes were in fact modelled on the crimson velvet Imperial Robe of Napoleon's *grand costume* and Napoleon's costume was in fact designed by Jean-Baptiste Isabey for Napoleon's coronation as Emperor in 1804 and has clearly had a big impact on George IV and he decided to use it for the model of his own robes, which as I've said, are quite distinct from anything that had gone before.

Reverting to Queen Victoria's coronation clothes, tantalisingly, her coronation dress is never fully seen in any depiction of her coronation, although a fragment in a surviving dress cuttings book, which you see here, which covers the period 1837 to 1844, and a record of the purchase of silk in the ledgers of the Office of Robes revealed that the dress was made of gold brocaded white satin, the fabric supplied by the royal mercer, William King. The silk incorporated yet more metal thread, this time silver gilt, it was almost certainly of Spitalfields manufacture, and what a pity that that dress doesn't survive.

We'll now take a closer look at some of the goldwork embroidery techniques. The ancient art of goldwork embroidery, like the weaving of cloth of gold, dates back to antiquity and has both civil and ecclesiastical origins. Just as the wearing of cloth of gold symbolised the status of the owner, the vestments of rulers, priests and generals embroidered with gold thread and precious stones and embroidered articles in their palaces and temples or churches emphasised the owner's wealth and social eminence, symbolising power and influence. The embroidery is seen widely in royal fashionable and ceremonial dress, as we've seen some examples already, in almost every country in Europe and Asia, from the 16th to the 20th century. In England in the medieval period, the emergence of heraldry, coats of arms and opulent tournament settings considerably expanded the realms of embroidery and it was also employed in decorating canopies for grand urban processions and coronation ceremonies. Goldwork embroidery in essence was applicable to three areas of life: furnishing, the religious domain and fashion. This banner is part of a group of four made partially for the coronation of King George VI in 1936 and partly for the coronation of Her Majesty the Queen in 1953. And here you can see that goldwork embroidery with its characteristic padded elements, which we see, probably can see under the lion, is also combined with

another ancient embroidery technique of silk shading, which, as its name suggests, gives a three-dimensional appearance to the embroidery through gradations of tone and colour. A more traditional form of goldwork embroidery is seen in this coronation girdle, presented to George VI for his coronation by the Worshipful Company of Girdlers. This is also included in the exhibition next door. The girdle is made of cloth of gold, which in turn is embroidered with a pattern of entwined filigrees and fleurs-de-lis. The girdle, essentially a sword belt, is used when the monarch is invested with the Sword of Offering, which is fastened or girded at the waist.

The use of a canopy during the coronation ceremony in England is recorded in the 'Liber Regalis' which I mentioned earlier. The canopy is used to cover the sovereign and consort during the procession to the sacred ceremony and another canopy is used during the ceremony itself for the most sacred moment, the anointing with holy oil, which effectively sets the sovereign apart from the people. This practice still continues today and there are several surviving canopies in the Royal Collection. The canopy used for the Queen's coronation in 1953, which you can see here, had been made for George VI's coronation. It is made of cloth of gold, which I think is quite clear, and the four flaps of fabric forming the sides are trimmed with silver thread fringe. Each of the flaps is embroidered with four silver imperial eagles. The cloth of gold in this case was woven by the firm of Warner & Sons of Essex and the embroidery was carried out by the Royal School of Needlework. The application of goldwork embroidery – oh sorry, there's a detail which gives you an idea; this is a very good example of this technique of padding underneath the silver thread embroidery, looks absolutely wonderful. The application of goldwork embroidery to dress again originates from ecclesiastical and military sources, to which it's of course still applied today. As we saw earlier, one of the earliest surviving depictions of a monarch wearing a gold embroidered garment is of Richard II in the late 14th century. But it was from the 16th century that its application to fashionable clothing, albeit reserved for only the wealthiest in society, became more widespread. Unfortunately, survivors of fashionable clothing from this period are extremely rare and we can only imagine the richness of such embroideries from painted or printed depictions and surviving accounts of the royal wardrobe. As before, the garments which provide the greatest indication of the richness of these effects are coronation robes, and even those made in the 20th century provide us with a remarkable insight into the complexity and variety of this embroidery technique as they

employ exactly the same methods of production and materials as their 16th and 17th century forerunners. In the 20th century the Coronation Robe, ie the robe worn at the end of the ceremony when a sovereign has been crowned and departs from Westminster Abbey to be seen by the people, follow the shape and form which has been more or less unchanged for four centuries. The Coronation Robe made for the Queen in 1953 was made by Ede & Ravenscroft to a traditional pattern. At first the Queen had considered wearing the robes made for her father, King George VI, but in the event she decided to have a new robe made. The Queen was anxious that it should not be plain like her father's robe and she specified, via her lady-in-waiting, her preferences for the embroidery design to Mrs Hamilton-King, who was the then principal of the Royal School of Needlework. The elegance and restraint of the finished design is of note when compared to the heavily embroidered designs of the Queen's consort's robes worn by Queen Mary and by Queen Elizabeth. So here's Queen Elizabeth in the painting by Gerald Kelly, and then Queen Mary. And you can see that the robes are covered with embroidery, literally, so these were much more complex schemes and much more decorative.

Looking at the border of the Queen's robe we see that the density of embroidery increased in detail from the cape to the apex of the robe and it incorporates wheat ears and olive branches, symbolising prosperity and peace, and I think this detail really shows us how the subtleties of tone and texture can be achieved with different types of gold thread and they're really shown to their maximum advantage through the expertise of the embroideresses who worked on this. And here's an image of one of the embroideresses at the Royal School Needlework working on the crown, which is at the apex of the robe. And the Queen in fact decided that her cipher should be intertwined rather than in capital letters, which she decided would look much too hard. And it's a detail of that. The work took 12 embroideresses more than 3,500 hours to complete, between March and May 1953 and the Royal School of Needlework employed its policy of never a seat goes cold, which meant that if an embroideress left the workroom for any reason, she was immediately replaced. And they still use that technique today, in fact, when they're working on large commissions. Moreover – and this I think is the wonderful thing – it's absolutely impossible to detect the hand of any individual worker, which gives the finished work a remarkable uniformity for which of course the Royal School of Needlework is renowned.

In order to achieve this wonderful subtlety of tone and variation seen here in the detail, no less than 18 different types of gold thread were used and I think this also helps us to understand that goldwork embroidery is a little bit more than just simple gold thread, there is so much variety in the types of threads available, and these of course have been used really since the 16th century, so it's a wonderful prolongation of that technique.

The use of goldwork embroidery was also seen on the Queen's coronation dress, designed by her couturier, Norman Hartnell. The design of coronation dresses in the 20th century involved not only rich fabrics and embellishments, particularly embroideries, but also evolving iconography. In October 1952 Hartnell was entrusted with the task of designing the Queen's dress. His talent for combining rich fabrics with exquisitely designed embroideries with both modern cuts and classically inspired lines made him the obvious choice to produce the most important dress of the Queen's reign. As he's often quoted as saying, 'I despise simplicity; it is the negation of all that is beautiful'. According to Hartnell's own account in his memoir, the Queen indicated that the dress should conform to the line of her wedding dress, also designed by Hartnell, and the material should be of white satin. This gave, in fact, Hartnell a relatively free rein and he set about painstaking research to study coronation dresses of earlier Queens, including Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria. As he put it, he thought of altar clothes and sacred vestments and everything heavenly that might be embroidered upon a dress destined to be historic. He produced nine designs for the Queen to see in total. The eighth met with her approval but she suggested some additions to the national emblems, that those of the dominions of which she was now Queen should be added in coloured silks, and in total there are 13 different emblems represented on the dress. The embroideries are executed in coloured silks, gold and silver thread, crystals, gold paillettes, pearls and bugle beads, and these are arranged in three scalloped graduating tiers which fall from the slightly pointed waist. The embroidery was carried out under the direction of Miss Edie Duley who was head of Hartnell's embroidery workroom, and it took a team of eight embroideresses eight weeks to complete. And the dress I think is rightly regarded as the masterpiece of 20th century royal couture. Just show a couple more details – here you can see how the gold thread is actually combined with the crystals in these Tudor roses and other elements; maple leaves.

From the 1930s gold lamé or tissue was seen in fashionable dress worn by everyone from ladies of society to film stars. The lamé was an open woven fabric which often featured thread that was not necessarily real gold or silver. These modern lamés were quite often seen in the fashionable as opposed to the ceremonial clothing of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. For example, the dress she wore for the Queen's coronation in 1953 incorporates a deep border of lamé and rich gold and silver embroidery. On the crinoline skirted gown of duchess satin and lamé we see the masterly embroidery is conceived in a feather design made of pearls, sequins, crystals, bugle beads and gold thread. And there's also a detail of that there.

The restrictions of the colour palette to be worn at coronations by the female members of the royal family really tested Hartnell's ingenuity to the limit, but his flair for combining fabrics and embroideries was such that each design retains its own style and personality. Hartnell attended the Queen's coronation seated in the box reserved for the Queen's personal guests and he was particularly affected by the colourful scene he saw before him, which is beautifully captured in Terence Cuneo's painting of the Coronation Theatre. Hartnell described how the various peers, peeresses and officers of state, including the Earl Marshal and the royal pages and pages of peers and peeresses, and I quote, 'Looked like a lovely hunk of fruitcake, the damson jam of velvet bordered with clotted cream of ermine and sprinkled with the sugar of diamonds', and I think that sums up exactly what the scene was like. So it was quite challenging for him to produce these important dresses and to give them the dignity that they really needed. He definitely succeeded of course with the coronation dress, but the other royal dresses were more difficult for him. And this is just to give you an idea of the kinds of colours that his clothes were battling with. So this is the Earl Marshal's coatee. The Earl Marshal of course is the most senior officer of state at the coronation and this coatee in fact is not even visible during the coronation because he's wearing his peer's robe over the top, but I wanted to show it to you because of the marvellous goldwork embroidery which is an absolute tour de force. And then of course the royal pages of honour who wear their own livery, again, this time decorated with the gold lace that we saw earlier on the Coronation Robes of George III. So there's a huge amount of colour going on at the coronation ceremony. For Princess Margaret, Hartnell created a dress of white satin with an openwork design of broderie anglaise and this was applied with crystal embroideries in silver and gold thread and pearls in a design of marguerites and roses, a reference of

course to her name, Margaret Rose. Her robe of purple silk velvet was trimmed with gold lace in the traditional manner and of course with ermine. Hartnell himself described the Duchess of Kent's entrance to Westminster Abbey as 'tall and classically beautiful as a Greek column in white satin and gold embroideries and her daughter, Princess Alexandra, drifting in white tulle and lace glinting with golden thread'. And here is the Duchess of Kent's dress. Again, you can see this incredible level of embroidery here, and again in the detail, and again, you have this wonderful mixture of gold thread, of sequins, pearls, paillettes, crystals, all so beautifully worked. And again, here's a detail of the skirt which is so richly embroidered.

In fashionable dress or royal couture of the 20th century, gold and glitter is provided by both modern gold fabrics and also exquisite tambour embroideries. All of those couturiers who have worked for the Queen have deployed these techniques for dresses designed to be worn on important state occasions, usually for eveningwear. The most successful examples are those that combine a limited colour palette, usually white or cream with gold, silver and crystal beads, sequins, pearls and paillettes, exactly as we see here. Hartnell's great forte was this combination of fabrics and exquisite embroidery design, unlike Hardy Amies whose forte was really tailoring and who would outsource any of his embroidery requirements to the firm of Hand & Lock. Hartnell made embroidery the centrepiece of his production. He created a dedicated workroom that at its height employed some 25 embroideresses, working to the head of the workroom. And the embroideresses usually worked in pairs or sometimes in a group of four on a dress, for example, with a full circle skirt, four would work together. Once Hartnell had settled on a design and colour scheme for a particular dress, the pattern hands would make up the design to his instructions as a sample showing both the fabrics to be used and the embroidery motifs and beads. The myriad of materials would be sourced through the London agents, usually Schwanks [ph], with crystals, beads, paillettes and sequins sourced from Austria and Czechoslovakia and pearls from Japan. Designs would be drawn on to the fabric using tracing paper and French chalk pencils and the embroidery was usually carried out using the tambour method, which meant working from the wrong side of the fabric, sometimes on huge frames to accommodate the large panels needed for these grand dresses. The work took tremendous skill and flair and each embroideress had to excel at every aspect, as well as developing specialism, for example, working only on bodice embroidery.

For her first Commonwealth tour of 1953-4 the Queen travelled more than 40,000 miles, visiting the West Indies, Australasia, Asia and Africa during a period of seven months, from November 1953 to May 1954. The logistics, as you can probably imagine, were hugely complicated and the wardrobe required was vast, with most days involving at least three or four engagements, on an average two or three changes of clothes per day. Banquets, state dinners, investitures, receptions, recitals, all required grand dresses. In fact, the Queen even required her coronation dress, which she wore on three occasions during the Commonwealth tour, to the State Opening of Parliament in Wellington, Canberra and Colombo. Hartnell produced an incredible array of state evening dresses and daywear, appropriate to each climate and country, often incorporating national colours and emblems in an overt and diplomatic display of empathy for the people and the place. On the major tours of the first decades of the Queen's reign, up to 50 dresses at a time would be ordered from Hartnell. For example, on a three week tour to Nigeria in January and February 1956, the Queen addressed the House of Representatives in Lagos and on this occasion, which you see here, she wore a cream duchess satin dress, designed by Norman Hartnell, with gold and pearl embroideries. And I think what's interesting here is we see that the embroideries denote not only the status of the monarch as head of state, head of the Commonwealth, but also recalls the tribal tradition and kingship indicated by this detailed looped beadwork. And this is exactly what inspired Hartnell's design and this is a traditional, a part of traditional Nigerian culture.

A dress which survives from that first Commonwealth tour of the Queen's reign is this very elegant, very fashionable, one-shouldered crinoline-skirted gown and this is made of gold lamé overlaid with lace and cream silk tulle, and the lace here has been re-embroidered over the top with gold thread, which just reinforces that message and this beautiful regal quality. The dress is both regal and the height of fashion with its nipped in waist, full skirt and asymmetric bodice, but in the choice of materials - gold lamé and gold thread - Hartnell reinforces subtly the status of the monarch, who wore the dress in fact for an investiture that she conducted in Wellington. And there we are, the Queen wearing the dress. On a subsequent visit to Wellington on 12th February 1963, the Queen opened the third session of the 33rd Parliament, for which Hartnell designed yet another remarkable dress, showcasing the extraordinary virtuosity of his embroidery. Here the bodice is embroidered in its entirety - I've got a detail there - with a geometric diamond pattern of gold and silver bugle beads, crystals and pearls. Each diamond is

centred by a tassel drop of alternate silver and gold bugle beads. And the embroidery continues under the scissor-cut skirt, which you can see at the front, and also down the back of the skirt, emphasising the importance of the 360 degree view of the Queen and Hartnell's understanding of how his embroidery and the cut of the dress would work on the body, catching the light at every available angle. The perfectly aligned embroidery over each and every seam reveals the skill of the seamstresses and the embroidery workroom, who would re-embroider and check every seam once the final fitting of the dress had been completed, ensuring that even under the closest scrutiny the dress would appear flawless in its execution.

I would like to end today with a dress designed by Hartnell for the Queen's visit to Malta in November 1967. Even for this dress, which is somewhat daring in its almost languid lines and relaxed draping from the shoulders and its utterly plain surface, we see Hartnell employing those techniques for which he was famous. And just as fashionable and ceremonial dress from as early as the 16th century had deployed this rich embellishment of gold embroidery and beading or lace woven with metal thread, or more overt use of cloth of gold, we can see that designers of royal couture in the 20th century are not only using those same techniques developed so many centuries earlier, and also the same materials, but they're using them to deliver exactly the same messages of status and importance. Hartnell understood that on a dress as fashionable as this, his bold and rich gold and silver hemline embroidery would be just enough to indicate the status of its wearer. Thank you.

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