

# Royal Gold: Reflections of Power

The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace

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*Hello, and welcome to a podcast from Royal Collection Trust where we'll be looking at how gold has for centuries been associated with royalty. Traditionally it has been used to create the regalia and other trappings associated with coronations, yet surprisingly few items in the Royal Collection are made from solid gold. Coming up, Kathryn Jones, Curator of Decorative Arts at Royal Collection Trust, gives a lecture entitled, 'Royal Gold: Reflections of Power' at the Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace. She will examine a few of these works of art in detail and explore how gold has been used to denote the highest degree of status and authority. This is an enhanced podcast so you'll be able to see the images being spoken about on the screen of your device.*

[00:48]

Kathryn Jones: Good afternoon everyone. A German visiting Windsor Castle in 1598 recorded that 'The walls of the Palace shine with gold and silver' and noted a cabinet where 'Besides everything glitters so with silver, gold and jewels as to dazzle one's eyes'. In 1517 Henry VIII held a great banquet at Whitehall for the Ambassadors of France and the Venetian Republic where a great buffet was placed beside the dining table. The display included silver and gold vases worth vast treasure and larger vases of silver gilt. After the banquet the plate was deliberately left on show so that the public could come and view it. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century George IV devised gilded decorative schemes like this one at Buckingham Palace, which were intended to act as a shimmering backdrop to his lavish and theatrical entertainments, and set off the monarch like a jewel in a gold setting. The expectation, even today, is that when someone comes to one of the royal palaces they will see the home of the Queen decorated in gold leaf. Last year we invited a group of children to come and test our new multimedia guide to

the Palace and when we asked them what they thought of when we said Buckingham Palace, the first thing they all came up with, before the Queen, before the corgis, was gold. So you can see a close link between gold and royalty has existed since at least the time of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, and it still exists today. Monarchs are crowned in gold, the coronation regalia is gold, even the coronation vestments are made from cloth of gold. The sovereign proceeds to and from the coronation in a gilded coach. After the coronation a great banquet is held where the King dines off gold plate. Since the time of Alfred the Great a royal mint has been directly under the control of the monarchy. For 500 years the mint itself was housed within a royal palace, the Tower of London, and even today the Master of the Mint acts on behalf of the sovereign. The link between gold and the monarchy is therefore inextricable. It is not my intention here today, however, to discuss the great gilded interiors of the royal palaces or the personal collections of the monarchs, which have in the past encompassed gilded furniture, tapestries woven with gold thread and gold snuff boxes. Instead, the focus today is on the great ceremonial objects of gold which reflect the power and status of the sovereign.

[03:16]

Gold has been found throughout Britain but it has always been a rarity. Gold was probably first discovered at least 5,000 years ago in this country, but to date only about ten tons of it have been mined here. The largest deposits have been found in north Wales and Cornwall and areas of Northern Ireland and in the southern uplands of Scotland. Its very rarity has meant that it has an extremely high value, and until the 16<sup>th</sup> century when gold deposits from the New World could be exploited in Europe, gold was extremely scarce and its use often limited only to the Church and to the King. Unlike silver, gold does not tarnish or oxidise, and therefore retains its distinctive colour and lustre. For this reason gold has always been considered pure and incorruptible and therefore suitable for use by a ruler. Indeed, alchemists called it a 'noble metal'. Gold appears to be indestructible as it does not react to outside forces such as acids, as other metals do. Leonard da Vinci, writing in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, noted that 'By much study and experiment the old alchemists are seeking to create not the meanest of nature's products, but the most excellent, namely gold, which is begotten by the sun insomuch as it has more resemblance to it than to anything else and no created thing is more enduring than gold. It is immune to fire, which has power over the rest of created things'. Gold then is a material associated with power, with resilience and a metal that appears to be incorruptible. Sir John Ferne, a 16<sup>th</sup> century courtier recalling

the coronation of Elizabeth I, described 'The crown set on her head is of gold to signify her excellent majesty'. According to Ferne, 'Gold admonishes the monarch to practise wisdom'.

[05:08]

It is with crowns, therefore, that we should perhaps start our discussion of royal gold. If I show this portrait of a King dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it's possible that you may not instantly recognise the face of Richard II. However, you are left in no doubt that this is a King. He wears a robe of ermine with a golden collar studded with pearls and other jewels and with a large neck badge, also gold, I think set with a ruby. On his head is a gold crown. This portrait is derived from one at Westminster Abbey and where the full-length version, although heavily restored, shows the King enthroned holding a sceptre and orb and against a backdrop of tooled gold leaf. Although much of this is later work, probably added in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, recent analysis suggests that this has always had a gilded background. An earlier portrait of the King as a younger man shows him in a similar way, against a backdrop of gold with a golden crown and robe woven with gold thread. It is no coincidence that the only other figure, other than Richard, dressed in gold in the painting is the Christ Child. It is not known when the first gold crowns were used for British coronations, although ceremonial headdresses have been known since at least the Iron Age. In 1988 in Kent the skull of an Iron Age ruler, known as the Mill Hill Warrior, was unearthed. The skull was still wearing a crown in the form of a circlet with arches above. But it wasn't gold, it was made of bronze. Gold used in coronations is perhaps therefore a Christian tradition. One of the Psalms written by David relating to a biblical King contains the words, 'Thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head' and this suggests that the tradition of crowning with gold is an extremely ancient one. Gold crowns were in use in Western Europe from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, probably in a tradition dating back to the Byzantine Emperors. Early depictions of English coronations do show metal crowns, but it's not always easy to tell whether they're made of gold. By the time of this manuscript, however, which you can see is dated to around 1130, gold was the usual material used and the form of crown often included crosses - I hope you can just make them out, they're very tiny on this image, but you can just see small crosses there - which made the link between the King and his apparently divine status. This link does not seem to have been limited to Europe and next door you will see a crown or ceremonial headdress from Ecuador dating to the time before the Incas. Although a very simple design, the crown is clearly an object of importance as it was part of a burial. By the time of the Reformation the

British crown had changed. It was still made of gold and included crosses and in this case, fleurs-de-lis, to show that the British monarch had claims to rule parts of France, but it was now topped by two crossing arches with a monde or globe-shaped piece at the top representing the world. The arches were intended to represent the fact that the monarchs of England were not subject to any other power, particularly that of the Pope. Charles I's crown follows a similar form and we can see in this portrait by Van Dyck, although the crown is encrusted with jewels, the predominant material is gold. In 1649, after the beheading of Charles I, Oliver Cromwell melted down the Crown Jewels in a symbolic gesture, sweeping away the monarchy and gaining gold for the coffers at the same time. Selling off small items of plate or converting them back into bullion for re-use was not a new practice. James I had already depleted the jewel house in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and Charles I himself had sold off others at the start of his reign. But the act in 1649 was deliberate. The Crown Jewels were first seized in 1644, the chief culprit, according to later reports, was the MP, Henry Martin, and a contemporary observer wrote that he smashed in the locks of the chamber inside Westminster Abbey where the regalia was kept and declared there would be 'no more use for these toys and trifles'. However, the Members of the House of Lords refused to sanction the melting down of the plate and much of it survived for many more years. As the Civil War dragged on, however, lesser parts of the collection were melted down for coin. It wasn't until after Charles I's death that the regalia was entirely assigned for destruction. The orders came that the pieces were to be totally broken and defaced so that they no longer held any symbolic meaning. The crowns and other regalia were stripped of their precious stones and sent to the mint to be melted down. The liquid gold was then converted into gold coins, each bearing the words, 'The Commonwealth of England'.

[10:00]

At the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 therefore, Charles II needed an entirely new set of Crown Jewels. These were provided by Sir Robert Viner, officially the royal goldsmith, although of course he's not actually at this stage a working goldsmith, he was actually a wealthy banker. Viner and his uncle, Thomas, were both aldermen of the City of London and they supplied the new Crown Jewels in time for Charles II's coronation in 1661. There was no intention to reproduce Charles I's lost crown exactly, but the form of crosses and fleurs-de-lis was retained in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. This shape was thought to have derived from the form favoured by the last Anglo-Saxon King of England, Edward the Confessor, or St Edward as he was known. And so the crown has always had the

title, St Edward's Crown. The coronation ceremony is a complex religious service which involves several distinct sections. After the monarch has been formally recognised by the nation and has sworn a coronation oath, the Archbishop then anoints him or her with holy oil. Then, seated in King Edward's chair, the regalia are presented, each with a symbolic meaning and specific words relating to the way in which the sovereign should rule. The final moment comes when the St Edward's Crown is placed on the monarch's head and the assembled peers shout 'God save the King' or 'God save the Queen'. Traditionally the crown was kept in Westminster Abbey and it's not supposed to leave there. A second crown or State Crown, therefore, was created for the procession out of the Abbey and for state occasions when the monarch might appear wearing a crown, such as the opening of Parliament. St Edward's Crown, created for Charles II, is now housed in the Tower of London and has been used at every coronation since Charles II's, including that of the Queen in 1953. The crown, like Charles I's before it, is predominantly gold and although adorned with jewels is restrained by comparison with other crowns in the collection. And I'm just showing you the Imperial State Crown, which is almost entirely composed of precious stones and the gold, there is a gold frame under there but you can barely see it amidst the dazzle of the diamonds. This was also true, for example, of Charles II's State Crown, which does not survive, but was known to include 890 diamonds, ten rubies, 18 sapphires, 21 emeralds and 549 pearls. St Edward's Crown, by comparison, is decorated with gold beads instead of pearls. Because of its weight, for 200 years from the coronation of Queen Anne in 1702 until that of Edward VII in 1902, the crown was not actually worn by the monarch, but was carried in the coronation procession and placed on the altar during this coronation ceremony. At the time of King George V's coronation, 1910, the weight of the gold was greatly reduced so that the crown could be re-used, although it still weighs almost five pounds, it's about 2.2 kilos.

[13:03]

The crown and all the other regalia, incidentally, are all made from 22 carat gold, which was the only standard of gold available until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Of course it's not only the crown that's made of gold. Most of the regalia - the orb, the sceptres and other items with which the monarch is invested during the ceremony - are traditionally made of gold. The orb, which you can see here, was formed from a hollow golden sphere. It's a representation of the sovereign's power, symbolising the Christian world with its cross mounted on a globe and the bands of jewels dividing it into three sections, representing the three continents known in

Medieval times. The sovereign also receives two gold sceptres during the ceremony. One is topped with an enamelled dove and represents the sovereign's spiritual role, the dove representing the Holy Ghost. Traditionally it has been known as the Rod of Equity and Mercy. At the coronation of William I, William the Conqueror, in 1066, a contemporary described it as, 'For by the sceptre uprisings in the kingdom are controlled and the rod gathers and confines those men that stray'. The other sceptre has a cross at the top and is associated with the monarch's temporal power and good governance. Believe it or not, the coronation robes are also made from gold, in this case cloth of gold. Because gold is very ductile it can be drawn into extremely fine wires which can then be wrapped around threads of silk and woven to create a shimmering fabric. After the anointing the monarch is dressed in a simple white under tunic, over which is placed a tunic known as the supertunica. And this is worn with the girdle, which you can just see here. The girdle is actually a sword belt and we've got an example of one in the exhibition, it's George VI's girdle from his coronation. And the stole, which is around the neck here, the stole is a reminder of priestly vestments and is thought to remind the monarch of the spiritual responsibilities of a ruler. Most of the garments are made newly for each coronation, but the most important garment is this one, the Imperial Mantle, also known as the Dalmatica, which dates back to the coronation of George IV in 1821. Perhaps because of its large size Queen Victoria had her own mantle woven, although it's to an identical pattern, and you can see it quite clearly here in the painting by Leslie, which is in the exhibition, where the Queen is surrounded by a pool of gold glittering in the light of the rays of the sun from above. Perhaps this is a reference to that solemn moment of the ceremony when, as the monarch takes the sacrament, the light appears to represent God himself blessing the young Victoria as she takes on the role of Queen. Because the sacrament forms part of the coronation service, a chalice and paten of gold were created for Charles II's coronation in 1661 and have remained among the crown jewels. In the commission for these it is noticed they are of finest Guinea gold, gold from Africa, and only one other gold chalice and paten exists in the Royal Collection, the rest are made from silver gilt. Gold has traditionally been used for items of religious worship, again because of its perceived purity, and underlining that close relationship between royalty and divinity.

[16:34]

Finally, I want to talk about the throne. The biblical description of King Solomon's throne describes a chair of ivory entirely covered in gold with steps leading up to

it, each with two golden animals on them. Perhaps as a reminder of this, in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century a coronation chair was commissioned by Edward I, which is now known as King Edward's Chair. The chair, which houses the coronation stone, the famous Stone of Scone, during the coronation ceremony is always kept in Westminster Abbey. It was originally gilded all over, much like Solomon's throne, and it fits on four lions, perhaps also a reference to Solomon. By the time of Queen Victoria's coronation in 1837, not surprisingly most of the gilding had worn away and the Queen decided to cover the throne in cloth of gold, and you can see it here in this image by Hayter. Until the Reformation the coronation also acted in another capacity. The crowning and anointing with holy oil not only served to confirm the monarch as rightful ruler, but it also created him or her as God's representative on earth, almost a divine being in their own right. The crown was the outward symbol of this authority. It's no surprise, therefore, that many items used in a coronation derive from religious rituals. Before we finally leave the coronation, I wanted to show you Whittaker's fabulous souvenir brochure, if you can call it that, of the most lavish coronation, that of George IV which took place in 1821. The King had been estranged from his wife, Caroline of Brunswick, and was keen to court public sympathy, so he decided that a grand spectacle would be a suitable way of winning back his subjects' loyalty. Parliament voted an enormous sum of £240,000 for the occasion and it was truly an engaging sight. George IV revived many ancient traditions for this ceremony, including introducing herb strewers to walk in the procession, a reminder of the Medieval court where herb strewers usually scattered health giving and scented flowers around the royal apartments. The costumes of everyone involved in the procession were designed with an Elizabethan and Jacobean theme to recall England's heritage. As a record of the event, the King commissioned hand-coloured illustrations of each of the figures who took part in the ceremony with their titles printed actually in gold. This technique of printing was the invention of the printer himself, John Whittaker, but it was kept entirely secret. The resulting book, which is printed in elephant folio format, takes almost two people to lift it, it's so heavy. Only six copies of the volume were produced and although he was advanced £5,000 towards the cost, the final sum was to bankrupt Whittaker. The copies were presented to each of the crowned heads of Europe and the one on display in the exhibition next door seems to have been George IV's personal copy. [19:45]

George IV's more restrained father, George III, is not traditionally associated with lavish gilding or the extensive use of gold, but it was for him that the Gold State

Coach was designed in 1760 for use at his coronation, although sadly, because it was such a complex project, it was not ready in time and it was delivered in 1762. It was first used for the State Opening of Parliament that year. The State Coach has been used at every subsequent coronation, as well as the great state occasions such as the jubilees. It was designed by the architect, Sir William Chambers, a close associate of the King and it has been described as a rolling manifesto. The door panels are decorated with paintings by Giovanni Cipriani and show the naval might of Britain, but stressing the role of peace. It includes great gilded figures of tritons blowing horns in the form of seashells. And incidentally you can go and see the Gold State Coach in the Royal Mews next door. More lavish in its use of gilding than any previous vehicle, the coach cost over £7,500. The gilding was an enormous expense, costing almost £10,000 on its own, three times as much as the painting. Usually when a piece of furniture is gilded, the wood is covered in a layer known as gesso, a combination of linseed oil, whiting and glue. This hardens to form a good surface to which the gold leaf can cling when it's applied. With the State Coach, however, gesso wouldn't have been suitable because it's vulnerable to chipping, so here the gold leaf was applied over built up layers of oil paint. A description of the coach in the London Chronicle in 1762 notes that the gold was applied to three thicknesses. It was completely re-gilded in 1775 and five further gilding schemes have taken place since, usually in tandem with large royal ceremonies, so tending to be the coronations and jubilees. William IV had the interiors reupholstered with gold embroidered scarlet velvet with the seating and curtains trimmed in gold lace. Sadly, the movement of the coach does not match the luxurious fittings. William IV described riding in it as 'being tossed on a rough sea' and Queen Victoria complained of 'the distressing oscillation'. But the coach remains in use to this day, a symbolic centrepiece of royal pageantry.

[22:16]

The coronation ceremony was traditionally followed by a great banquet held in Westminster Hall. The monarch would sit on a raised dais, surrounded by buffets of plate, a traditional symbol of wealth and status. The other people seated here are the peers of the realm who sat at the long tables. Members of the court and others were usually able to attend the feast. Samuel Pepys, for example, records attending the coronation of Charles II. He had to arrive at the Abbey at four o'clock in the morning and sat there until 11 before the ceremony started. He records that he could see almost nothing and hear none of the music. Afterwards he attended the banquet itself where he was a little more lucky and he was

offered food from the table of some of the lords. But, nevertheless, his entry in his diary records, 'Now, after all this I can say that besides the pleasure of the sight of these glorious things, I may now shut my eyes against any other objects, nor for the future trouble myself to see things of state and show as being sure never to see the like again in this world'. Visitors to coronation banquets usually record seeing the monarch eating off gold plate. Certainly the newspaper reports of the banquet of George IV note that the sideboards tend to receive the plate, consisting of a series of shelves, fixed against the drapery on the wall behind the throne. They were placed on the right and left of the throne and on being covered as they were before the banquet with massive gold plate brought from Carlton House and Windsor, the effect produced was extremely brilliant. In fact, almost all the banqueting plate is likely to have been silver gilt. Silver gilt or silver coated in a thin layer of gold is intended to serve exactly this purpose, the gilding giving the appearance that the object beneath is entirely made of gold. Traditionally, items made for the dessert course were usually gilded because the acidic juices from fruit, for example, were liable to damage the silver but they didn't damage gilding. However, George IV was aware of the importance of gilding all his plate. In 1806 he had commissioned an enormous dining service when he was Prince of Wales. The first delivery of the service was completed in 1811 and George continued to add to the service throughout the rest of his life. The resulting dinner service, now known as the Grand Service, includes 4,000 pieces of dining plate, the last of which, an enormous punch bowl, was not completed until after the King's death in 1830. And those of you who have visited the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London will have seen the punch bowl sitting among the Crown Jewels. At first, parts of this service were plain silver, known as 'white plate', and only certain pieces were gilded. However, Mary Frampton, a visitor to Carlton House, the Prince's residence on the Mall, noted that all was in gold or silver gilt, which made the silver plate set out in the deep recessed windows look cold and poor, even though in reality it was very massive and handsome. Such comments as this must have stung George IV into action and by the end of his life almost the entire service was gilded. It's not surprising therefore, that any spectators watching the King dine would have thought he was eating off pure gold. Items made of solid gold for the table, however, were extremely rare. The royal goldsmiths, Rundell, Bridge & Rundell, worked exhaustively for George IV. They started working for him when he was Prince of Wales in the 1790s and by the time he was the King they would often make daily visits to the Palace to supply jewellery, insignia and items of silver, or to discuss

new designs. Such a relationship between a monarch and his craftsman was extraordinary. During his lifetime the King spent more than £120,000 with the firm. Remember that the State Coach had cost just over £7,000, so it gives you some idea of the scale of spending. However, even for such an extravagant figure as George IV, only six items of solid gold were ever created. Of these, two are currently on show in the exhibition next door. Surprisingly the order for neither one of these has been traced. One is this gold cup and cover. The hallmarks show that it was made in the year 1820-21 and if you look closely at it you can see that the finial on the top is a crown sitting on a cushion, which suggests that probably this cup relates in some way to the coronation. I don't know if you can make it out, but it's also decorated with small wreaths of flowers and if you look very closely at it you can see that they are roses, thistles and shamrocks. The handles are made from oak branches and there are small acorns decorating the leaves, and oaks were also considered a patriotic symbol, particularly in this period. Gold cups were used during the coronation banquet of George IV to serve wine to the King and these were often handed out as perquisites to those serving at the banquet. A gold cup, for example, is recorded as being presented to the Lord Mayor of London who was involved in the coronation procession. It's not clear what the function of this particular cup and cover might have been, but perhaps it was simply to sit on the magnificent buffet behind the King.

[27:52]

The other object which we're showing the exhibition of solid gold is this enormous gold tray. The tray was created also by the royal goldsmiths, Rundell, Bridge & Rundell, and weighs 19 pounds, that's eight and a half kilos of gold. It sits on four feet, which you can't really see in this image, but if you go into the exhibition you'll see they're two lions and two unicorns. In the centre the tray is engraved with George IV's royal cipher with the crown above it and it's sitting inside a collar, which is associated with the Order of the Garter. The Order of the Garter is the oldest chivalric order in Europe, created by Edward III in 1348. Essentially it was a group of hand-picked knights who supported the King on the battlefield, but also offered counsel and support. The badge of the Garter represents St George slaying the dragon, a reference to the knights' valour. The Order set the example for many other European countries who in turn created their own orders of chivalry, groups of knights who served their monarch, upholding Christian tradition and offering support. Often foreign heads of state were presented with membership of orders as Stranger Knights, as they were known, essentially honorary members. This tray shows the badges of every order to which George

IV belonged at the time of his coronation. I was just going to pick out two for you. This one here, which I hope you can see is an elephant, is the Danish order of chivalry, the Order of the Elephant, established in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. And to the left of it is what appears to be a floppy sheep. It's in fact the Order of the Golden Fleece, an order set up by Philip III, Duke of Burgundy in 1430. The Golden Fleece of course relates closely to the myth of Jason and the Argonauts, which I'm sure you're all familiar with. Jason was sent on a quest to retrieve the fleece of a golden haired winged ram in order to regain his kingdom. However, this myth was essentially a pagan story and the chivalric orders were supposed to have a Christian element to them, so the golden fleece was also related to the story of Gideon in the Old Testament. Gideon was a man who doubted the existence of God until he pegged a sheep's fleece on the ground and asked God to allow the dew to fall on the ground but not on the fleece, and the next morning when he awoke the fleece was dry and the ground was wet and Gideon's doubts were removed. The tray is listed in the inventories of the Royal Collection in 1832. A handwritten note beside the entry says, 'Why not stated from what this was made?' The only other item of gold listed in that inventory is another salver about ten and a quarter inches in diameter with a chased oak border, made for George IV's younger brother, Frederick, Duke of York. Next to this entry in that inventory it says, 'The salver was made from snuff boxes in which the freedoms of Bath, Oxford, York, Plymouth and Hamburg were presented to His Royal Highness'. The query written next to this tray, therefore, is interesting because it suggests that most of the gold used at this time was recycled; gold boxes, for example, being melted down to create larger items like this tray.

[31:28]

Moving away from coronations then, what else within the Royal Collection was made from gold? Perhaps the reason why so little gold is listed in the inventories of royal plate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is that most of the earlier works were melted down, either for refashioning or for creating immediate funds. Some clue as to their nature, however, does survive. An inventory of Henry VIII's property, which was begun in 1547 shortly after the King's death, lists gold pots, cups, candlesticks, goblets, salts, ewers and basins, glasses garnished with gold and flagons. At this date sumptuary laws still existed in England, dictating the use of certain materials, and gold was one of these. It was reserved only for the highest echelons of society, really the top members of the nobility and the monarch. The inventory is very careful to distinguish between items of gold and items of silver gilt, so it is likely that Henry VIII did indeed use solid gold objects on his table.

On the great feast days, such as St George's Day, it is recorded the King's table was set with salts of fine gold and precious stones, spoons, cups and dishes of fine gold, and all the salts on the board in the presents chamber were of fine gold. Although none of these survive, I'm just showing this example as the type of salt that probably would have appeared on Henry VIII's table. Another record mentions that the three carving knives and the King's knife had gold hafts or handles and on the left of the King's board and a good space beneath was a cupboard of six stages furnished with pots, cups, layers, castors and other suchlike of fine gold for the King's board only. One of the cups that's likely to have been among these gifts is now in the British Museum. It's known as the Royal Gold Cup and it was in fact created as a gift from the Duc de Berry to Charles V of France in about 1370. As I hope you can see, the cup is exquisitely enamelled with the story of St Agnes. It was somehow acquired by John, Duke of Bedford, in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century and from there it passed into the collection of Henry VIII. And around the foot, here, you can see this band has been added and these objects here, they're the enamelled Tudor roses, so this shows that it was firmly in the Tudor collection under Henry VIII.

[34:07]

The most extravagant example of the Tudors using gold, of course, is the meeting between Henry VIII and François I of France in 1520 at the Field of Cloth of Gold. The meeting was organised by Cardinal Wolsey to shore up a fragile peace treaty that had been signed two years earlier, the so-called Treaty of London. And it took place north of Arras in France in what was technically English territory. The visit was intended simply to enhance relations between France and England, but it became an excuse for each King to try and outdo the other in his display of wealth and rank. This painting in the Royal Collection records the event. Henry VIII himself appears three times in the painting. Apparently the King was accompanied by his wife, Catherine of Aragon, and a large retinue of knights, and of course his household entourage. But he also had with him two monkeys, a gift from Selim I, the Ottoman ruler, which were said to have been gilded with gold leaf. Henry VIII was given a wooden palace to live in during his stay, dressed in painted canvas so that it resembled a real palace, but it had real chimneys and fitted glass windows. And then on this side you can see the pavilions which were used to entertain the visitors, which were woven from cloth of gold, from which the meeting derived its name.

[35:38]

The high point of using gold on the royal table was after the Restoration in 1660. John Evelyn, another famous courtier and diarist, records that when Catherine of Braganza arrived in England in 1663 to marry Charles II, she was presented with a toilet service all of massy gold, which was valued at £4,000. This included a knife, fork and spoon in gold in a case, all gold for the use of the Queen's majesty. Her mother-in-law, Henrietta Maria, also presented her with a great looking glass and toilet service of beaten and massive gold. The ceremony of dining in public was important in the Stuart court, members of the nobility would serve the King and Queen as they ate. They were also given access to watch the ceremony. This tradition was important as it showed how close to the King or Queen each courtier was. This continued until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, although it gradually became more public and less formal under George I and George II and by the end of George II's reign almost anyone could purchase a ticket to watch the King dine. An inventory of James, Duke of York, later James II's plate shows that he had a gold cup and cover, one cup, one gold porringer and cover, one gold pair of candlesticks and one gold étoile – that's a knife, fork and spoon. After the death of Queen Anne in 1714 a record at Kensington Palace noted that the housekeeper, Henry Lowman, opened a cupboard said to be in the jamb of the door within the private apartments of the Palace, and revealed a gold salver, cup and cover, and a gold trencher plate, as well as a knife, fork and spoon. These pieces were said to have always been kept by Mr Keen, the Closet Keeper to King William. That they were kept in such a private way show that they were the choicest pieces of plate kept for his personal use. In fact, this set was a gift from Mary II to her husband, William III. At this date when the royal couple weren't dining in public, they would have eaten in their bedchamber, a private area. Dining rooms at this date were not so common. These pieces, therefore, were not for display but were for personal use and gold here has been chosen to emphasise their precious nature. They're not recorded in the archives of the jewel house, which usually cared for all the plate in the pantries of the royal palaces as well as the great ceremonial pieces such as the Crown Jewels and the banqueting plate. So these items were very personal, they travelled with the King and Queen when they went from one royal residence to another, for example, from Kensington to Hampton Court, and they were cared for by the privy or personal servants. When George I took over the throne of England in 1714 he tried to keep his two courts, one in London and one in Hanover, entirely separate. In each court were all the necessities for dining and ceremony and there was very little overlap between them. However, in July 1716 plate from the jewel office in London was shipped

out of the country to the Hanoverian court. A contemporary newspaper, 'The Shift Shifted', recorded that 'numbers of wagonloads are sent away from St James's as the like was never known'. Among the items sent to Hanover was the knife, fork and spoon which had belonged to William III as well as pieces from Queen Anne's collection, possibly the ones that were mentioned earlier. And a later record in Hanover records gold containers for salt and sugar, a little plate, an octagonal tazza, which is a sort of plate on a stand, and an under-saucer belonging to it and sets of six knives, forks and spoons in a black case.

[39:35]

The use of gold for public display underwent a revival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, partly as a result of George IV's great love of show, as we have seen, but he was also conscious that his great rival over the water, the Emperor Napoleon, was also decorating his court in Paris in a heavily gilded style, an imperial style which essentially derived from classical Rome. And both of them were particularly inspired by this building, which was known as the Golden House of Nero, or the Domus Aurea. This extraordinary palace was built for the Emperor Nero in around AD65 and it was completely decorated in gold leaf, which gave it its name. It was intended purely as a backdrop for entertaining. The space was large, as you can see, but it didn't have any of the usual necessities for everyday living, such as kitchens or bath houses. The palace was slightly an embarrassment to the figures of Rome and it was allowed to disappear under later building and it was only discovered in the 15<sup>th</sup> century when an ill-fated gentleman in Rome fell through an excavation and discovered this gilded house underneath. There's no denying the interest of both Napoleon and George IV in this building and particularly in its gilded elements, so trying to outdo each other, the courts in Paris and London became increasingly richly decorated in gold leaf.

[41:09]

Queen Victoria's attitude to gold was less evident. Capable of great spectacle herself, she was nevertheless wary of using gilding. And here I'm showing an image from St George's Chapel in Windsor. These are some exquisite Medieval ironwork gates that were created for the tomb of Edward IV within the chapel. These were originally completely gilded all over so they would have been extremely gaudy and they remained so even through the Civil War when most of the interior of the chapel was looted by the Parliamentarians. However, Queen Victoria thought they were unsuitable for a church interior and so in 1842 the gilding was removed and they are as they appear in this painting. Nevertheless, she could, if she wanted to, use gold and I'm sure you're all familiar with the

memorial to Prince Albert, which was created after his death, this great gilded sculpture presiding over what is now known as the Albertopolis; the Kensington museums, galleries, learned institutions and the concert hall, all dedicated to education and culture which had been inspired by Albert and his work on the Great Exhibition. The design for the monument was drawn up by George Gilbert Scott, and as you can see, it's very familiar, it shows Albert seated beneath his canopy which stands at 176 feet tall, and he's surrounded by sculptures representing the arts and the sciences. You can see in this image that Gilbert Scott's design does not show a gilded figure, although it certainly was cast in bronze and gilded for its initial opening in 1874. Possibly this was because of the intense pollution in London in the 1870s, the gilding would have served to protect the sculpture and ensure it remained a visible beacon. More importantly, it emphasised the incorruptible nature of Queen Victoria's beloved Albert who remained in her mind the purest figure known to her. Rather interestingly, a gold model of the memorial was created as a Golden Jubilee gift to Queen Victoria in 1887.

[43:29]

For the final section of this talk I wanted to turn to the other royal courts around the world and their use of gold. One of the elements that came out when we were constructing this exhibition was the universal nature of gold in showing status and power of rulers. In the Royal Library are a number of Islamic manuscripts, perhaps the finest of these is the 17<sup>th</sup> century Mughal manuscript known as the Padshahnama or Chronicle of the King of the World, which tells the story of the Emperor Shah-Jahan. The manuscript opens with a frontispiece depicting a shamsah, a sunburst or image of the sun. In the Mughal culture light and royalty are closely associated. A historian at the court of the Emperor recorded, for example, that the shamsah is a divine light which God directly transfers to Kings without assistance of men, and Kings are fond of external splendour because they consider it an image of divine glory. This image here, also from the Padshahnama, shows an event which took place twice a year on the lunar and solar birthdays of the Emperor. And you can see here he's being weighed on a set of enormous gold weighing scales. And then his equivalent weight in gold and precious stones was distributed as alms, and these figures at the bottom here are standing with their hands out waiting for the gold to be delivered to them. What's interesting about this, I just wanted to point out, was that Shah-Jahan, who's here, actually seems to have a halo, and this was known as his halo of kingship, so you can see again this close relationship between

kingship and divinity. At another Indian court, that of Tipu Sultan, ruler of Mysore in southern India in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the focus was on the Golden Throne. Tipu was the son of a soldier who had seized power in Mysore during the wars against the British in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. He consolidated power in the capital of the region, Seringapatam, where he introduced new systems of administration and farming, coinage and legal systems, and ran a very successful and enlightened court. His personal symbol was the tiger, which derived in part from a myth that as a young man he had been hunting a tiger with a friend and when he tried to shoot it, his gun failed to work and so he pulled out a dagger and killed the tiger just with a small dagger. Whether or not this story is true, the qualities of the tiger; its tenacity, power and strength, certainly appealed to the Sultan and within his court everything was decorated with tigers or tiger stripes: the furniture, the architecture, the textiles and even the uniforms of the guards. This was his great throne. This is an artist's impression, sadly the throne itself does not survive. But you can see the idea of it was an octagonal platform raised about four feet off the ground and entirely covered in sheet gold. The gold was decorated with tiger stripes and verses from the Koran. Above the platform was a sort of canopy in the form of a parasol which was also covered entirely in gold, and on top of that sat a golden bird of good fortune. But the most important point was this object here, the great life-size tiger, and here he is. As you know from the exhibition next door, this is tiger that sat at the front of Tipu's throne. It's made from wood but entirely covered in sheet gold about two millimetres thick and it's engraved, as you can see, with the stripes and the textured fur. It's not certain that Tipu himself ever sat on the throne. He claimed that he would not do so until the British had been defeated in India and he died in 1799, fighting the British forces at Seringapatam. But at least we have some idea of how the throne might have appeared, and fortunately for us, the large element, the tiger's head, ended up in the Royal Collection as a gift to William IV.

[47:41]

I just wanted to finish with one final object. This is a ceremonial gold object from the Royal Collection. It's a pen in the form of a quill, it's created from nine carat gold and it's made by the firm of Padgett [ph] & Brahm [ph] on behalf of the Chartered Institute of Secretaries, and it was a gift to Princess Elizabeth in 1947, the current Queen, and it was used to sign her marriage register. Thank you very much.

[applause]

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[ends at 48:37]