

Having us in STITCHES

Britain has an amazing heritage of embroidery, and this year marks 150 years of the Royal School of Needlework



A ballgown from the late Victorian period

You'd expect embroidery on royal wedding dresses and ceremonial garb but did you know it features on the sleeve of a Paul McCartney album, a FIFA logo and in *Game of Thrones*?

It's all the work of the Royal School of Needlework (RSN), which has been creating beautiful bespoke embroidery for art, fashion and royalty for 150 years.

Opened by Lady Victoria Welby above a bonnet shop in London's South Kensington

RSN degree students at Hampton Court



in 1872, its founding principles were to train young women in an occupation and to preserve hand embroidery as an art form. Queen Victoria's daughter Princess Helena was its first president and played

a key role in the early days, when it employed 20 ladies were based there.

Today, the Royal School of Needlework is also responsible for restoring and conserving valuable historical

pieces and stitching. It provides hand-embroidery classes to students far and wide from its current base at Hampton Court, as well as other locations in the UK, America and Japan.

Stitching specialists

London's premier embroidery house is Hand & Lock, which has been embellishing cloth for over 250 years. Specialising in the embroidery techniques that bring traditional bling to ceremonial occasions, its embroiderers embellish coronation attire and full military dress uniforms.

Among many high-profile projects, its embroiderers created the goldwork on Michael Jackson's iconic suits and the beading on the late Princess Diana's dresses.

Many of the techniques have changed little since their establishment in 1767. Like the Royal School of Needlework, Hand & Lock is committed to inspiring the next generation of embroiderers through an extensive education programme.



10 Woman's Weekly



Hand & Lock are holders of the Royal Warrant



The RSN workshop in the 1900s



Mary, Queen of Scots was a prolific embroiderer, who stitched her story in coded messages during her 19 years of imprisonment.



Embroiderers spent hundreds of hours stitching the flora of the 53 Commonwealth nations on the Duchess of Sussex's wedding veil. They had to wash their hands every 30 minutes!



'The Lost Garden' by RSN graduate Livia Papiernik

Craftmanship on the catwalk

Embroidery often features heavily in the designs of Alexander McQueen, one of the most respected fashion brands in the world.

Today, under the direction of Sarah Burton, the luxury fashion house contributes to community youth training programmes, providing embroidery workshops among other creative skills.

Sarah Burton famously designed the Duchess of Cambridge's wedding dress, with the lace appliqué on the skirt and bodice hand-stitched by the Royal School of Needlework.

Embroidery on show

Some exquisite embroidery examples need to be seen to be believed. Here are just a few of the many places in Britain where you can see textiles enhanced by skilful stitching.

Laid work from the 1950s



royal family as they celebrate their fascinating history with a new exhibition showcasing pieces from a 5,000-piece archive. You can listen to online talks and learn about life at the RSN and

the embroidery techniques they are famed for at royal-needlework.org.uk

❖ The **V&A**, or Victoria & Albert Museum, is the London home to a wide range of embroidered textiles from



Martha Edlin's casket

across the world. Highlights include embroidery designs by British textile designer William Morris and an incredible example of English 17th-century embroidery on a large casket, completed by 11-year-old Martha Edlin.

❖ **The Fitzwilliam Museum**, Cambridge, has a textile collection that includes over 400 samplers, spanning several centuries and displaying a wide range of needle techniques.

❖ *Blooming Marvellous: Flowers in Fashion, 1700s-2000s*, **Chertsey Museum**, Surrey, until 3 September.

Flowers and fashion have long gone hand in hand. The exhibition showcases examples of clothing beautifully enhanced with flowers through embroidery and other techniques.



A 1920s Japanese kimono

WORDS: MICHELLE ROWLEY
PHOTOS: ALAMY, GETTY, OLIVE MATTHEWS COLLECTION

❖ *150 Years of the Royal School of Needlework: Crown to Catwalk, Fashion & Textile Museum*, London, 1 April to 4 September.

Get up close to some of The Royal School of Needlework's commissions for the British