

NOBLE NEEDLEWORK

Prestigious embroidery house Hand & Lock talk to us about the power of 200-year-old traditions, their black book of royal connections and the promising future of crafting.

Written by Rachel Avery.

You would be hard-pushed to find many things that the Queen, Miss World and Kanye West have in common, but one thing that unites them all is the fine work of British embroidery house, Hand & Lock. The brand have been granted a Royal Warrant of Appointment by Queen Elizabeth II for their continued relationship with many royal households, working on an array of military uniforms and formal regalia. They are also responsible for creating the sash worn by Miss World (and not forgetting Mr World, too), and, most recently, have been working with Kanye West's fashion brand, Yeezy.

From the fine goldwork adorning military occasionwear through to the iron-on patches emblazoned on the backs of denim jackets of many Millennials, one of the most impressive things about this embroidery house, is the breadth of work they partake in. But nothing is more astounding than the company's heritage, spanning two centuries...

A REGAL HISTORY

The incredible story of the company began to be crafted back in 1767 when M. Hand, a French refugee, started creating and selling

lace to military tailors in London. M. Hand & Co. became a reputable company over the years, producing military badges and regalia for military tailors and the iconic Saville Row. The 'Lock' side of the name comes from Stanley Lock, a 1950s embroidery designer who made his name working for CE Phipps & Co. and eventually bought the company and renamed it S. Lock Ltd.

Between the two brands, their intricate handiwork has been sported by Marilyn Monroe, Michael Jackson and Diana, Princess of Wales. It was in 2001 that the Hand & Lock name was born, but with over 200 years of experience behind it, it was already established as a trusted and prestigious brand.

Notable commissions come frequently when you are such an iconic powerhouse in the crafting world, but 2012 was a pretty spectacular year. It was the year in which Britain played host to the Olympics and also celebrated the Queen's Diamond Jubilee

— and Hand & Lock took on an important role in both of these major events. Their work most visibly showcased upon Brian May's jacket for the London 2012 Summer Olympics opening ceremony and on the banner of the royal barge for the Jubilee.

A SIGNATURE STYLE

So, how does a company with a history that dates back to the 1760s manage to sustain such popularity today? Production Director

Jessica Pile believes its dedication to using traditional embroidery techniques has actually worked in the brand's favour. Essentially, they still prick and pounce (an embroidery transfer

method) just as they always have: "A lot of the work we do is exactly the same as the work we produced back in 1767 and we are recognised for our style of embroidery," says Jessica. "It has taken a long time to build our reputation in the many industries we sit in and therefore our history and heritage has

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Left: Hand & Lock embroiderer Juliet Ferry at work. She's passionate about celebrating and preserving this traditional skill: "The art of embroidery means endless possibilities and it all starts with a needle and thread, and this is why I cherish it so much. At Hand & Lock we try to have samples and monogramming completed in-house in the UK to make sure the skills will not get lost and disappear."





Photos: www.handembroidery.com

put us where we are today." And it's this commitment to a signature style that Jessica advises budding embroiderers to emulate: "If you look at embroiderers who have been successful, they all have a really clear style that comes through in their embroidery."

This reputation for excellence has propagated throughout the many decades and now the incredible work of Hand & Lock can be admired on the silver screen, the red carpet and the catwalk. Their international fashion house black book includes the likes of Dior, Burberry, Hermes, Louis Vuitton and Vivienne Westwood, just to name a few.

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

Hand & Lock are proud to have the accolade of London's oldest-serving embroidery house, but they are fully enlightened to the challenges that could have derailed such a traditional brand. Jessica speaks of the mass production from the Far East:

"Today it is a very large competitor of ours and we have to make sure we are able to compete or offer something that you cannot find there."

Hand & Lock embroiderer Juliet Ferry is passionate about retaining her craft: "The art of embroidery means endless possibilities and it all starts with a needle and thread, and this is why I cherish it so much. At Hand & Lock we try to have samples and hand-monogramming completed in-house in the UK to make sure the skills will not get lost and disappear."

"WHEN DIOR AND CHANEL PROMOTED THEIR VIDEOS OF EMBROIDERERS, THEY USED THEIR PLATFORM TO SHOW HOW EMBROIDERY IS A SERIOUS ART FORM, BY TRUE ARTISANS"

And although they do manage a dedicated workshop in India for larger-scale projects, their thriving London Atelier in the heart of Fitzrovia is testimony to the patriotic nature of the company. You can even experience the hive of activity for yourself as the workshop is opened up during the week for guided tours.

TECHNOLOGY TRIUMPHS

Producing meticulously beautiful work for more than two centuries, Hand & Lock are one of the few fine embroiderers that have stood the test of time. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that, although they are loyal to their tried-and-trusted techniques, their general business approach is very much one of contemporary innovation. "We use social media to promote our classes, studio tours and embroidery supplies and we see it as a great space to create a conversation about embroidery with our enthusiastic audience," says Communications Manager, Robert McCaffrey.

While the progression of globalisation may have proved to be challenging for the manufacturing industry in Britain,

the advances in technology have provided a wealth of opportunity for Hand & Lock. Jessica reports: "At London Craft Week we worked with Apple and Yinka Ilori to look at how technology has influenced craft and we used iPads to create a design." Robert speaks in the same positive light: "The internet has enabled us to share our passion for



embroidery with an international audience. Without the internet we couldn't teach our classes in the USA or sell our embroidery supplies in Australia."

SEWING SUPPORT

The company's legacy is not only apparent in the work with leading fashion designers and brands, but also through the more recent efforts to support the wider embroidery community. Since 2000, Hand & Lock have been investing time and money into training and education of this fine art. The Hand & Lock School for Embroidery has an array of workshops on monogramming, goldwork, silkshading, beading and an introduction into embroidering for budding beginners.

As well as classes in London, Hand & Lock host training workshops at the San Francisco School of Needlework and Design, where

their renowned skills are shared. And participants of the workshops can even request to receive a Hand & Lock certificate as proof of their quality skills.

Another of the ways Production Director Jessica sees Hand & Lock as "preserving the craft of hand embroidery" is through the Hand & Lock Prize For Embroidery. Juliet Ferry also champions the annual awards: "Every year we run a competition which I find very inspiring. It is a good way to see what has been done all around the world and is an opportunity to share experiences and techniques with candidates."

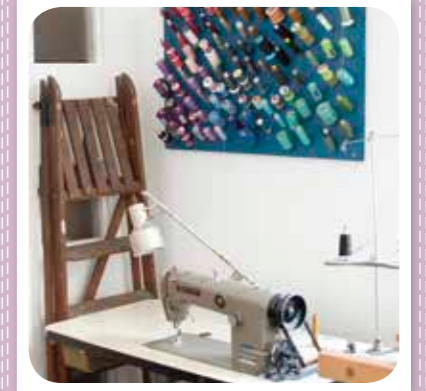
The competition was established in 2000, out of a desire to promote embroidery and its beauty but to also give unknown crafters a platform for their beautiful handiwork to be recognised. Many of the previous winners have gone on to start their own businesses or now work for leading design houses. The evolution of the Hand & Lock Prize For Embroidery has meant an expansion of categories and now digital embroidery is awarded as well as hand embroidery.

A NEW ERA FOR EMBROIDERY

Working hard to shake the image of embroidery being exclusively for the older generation, Communications Manager Robert McCaffrey applauds fashion brands for championing this skill and bringing it into public consciousness. "When Dior and Chanel promoted their behind-the-scenes videos of embroiderers working in the Paris workshops it really helped," he says. "It's like they pulled back the veil and used their platform to show how embroidery is a serious art form and the men and women working in the field are true artisans."

While other brands have succumbed to a forced metamorphosis, changing their ethos and techniques to try and move with the modern times, Hand & Lock have stayed true to their heritage to cement a trusted legacy. They have navigated the unsteady waters, following the ebbs and flows of embroidery's popularity, and today they stand proudly as both pioneers and champions of this incredible skill.

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A STAR-STUDED TIMELINE

From the glitz and glamour of the silver screen to the regal realms of the monarchy, here are some of the most memorable Hand & Lock commissions.

- 1953: Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell's dresses in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Embroidered by S. Lock Ltd.
- 1988: Gieves & Hawkes Jacket for Michael Jackson. Goldwork embroidered by M. Hand & Co.
- 1989: Elvis Dress worn by Diana, Princess of Wales. Designed by Catherine Walker, embroidered by S. Lock Ltd.
- 2007: Kate Moss Swarovski Flapper Dress. Designed and made by Hand & Lock.
- 2012: Queen's Diamond Jubilee Coat of Arms displayed on a barge. Designed and made by Hand & Lock.
- 2012: An embroidered jacket for Brian May, worn at the London Olympics. Designed and made by Hand & Lock.
- 2013: Louis Vuitton collaboration with the Chapman Brothers. Embroidery designed and made by Hand & Lock.
- 2016: Laces, military details and goldwork letters for Burberry's SS16 collection, produced and supplied by Hand & Lock.
- 2018: Porter magazine cover with Natalie Portman wearing an Andreas Kronthaler for Vivienne Westwood corset.

Centre: Production Director Jessica Pile recommends finding your own unique style: "If you look at embroiderers who have been successful, they all have a really clear style that comes through in their embroidery." Left: Hand & Lock create everything from red-carpet gowns and film costumes to military jackets like this exquisite example. Right: Tools of the trade – colourful threads at Hand & Lock's London studio, where they offer guided tours and workshops.

Photo centre: Saïorse Clean Photography. Other photos: www.handembroidery.com