

FURTHER NOTES ON THE VELVET FOR THEROYAL ROBES1. THE WEAVING OF VELVET

The making of velvet is a very ancient craft, and is believed to have been first practised in Italy in the 13th century. It has always been a highly specialised branch of the silk weaving industry. Various types of velvet, including imitations of silk velvet in less expensive materials, are now made on power looms, but the fine rich fabric of the quality used for the Royal Robes is only woven on hand looms.

The velvet for the Queen's Parliament Robe of Crimson and her Robe of Purple velvet, as well as the velvets for the State Trumpeters, are woven on looms identical with those used for hundreds of years. There are two warps; the ground, and the pole which makes the pile of the velvet. The weaver inserts three wires across the fabric as she weaves, with the silk threads of the pole stretched over the wires. When the third wire is woven in she cuts the silk over the first wire which she then lifts out and the cut ends of the silk stand up as a pile. There are over 16,000 such ends of silk to every square inch of velvet. The cloth is 21" wide. To cut the silk she uses a sharp blade held in a metal frame called a truvat. The slightest variation in the sharpness of the blade or the tension of the warp will change the colour of the velvet: this gives some idea of the skill and concentration required of the weaver. No other fabric has the same depth and intensity of colour. Before it is cut the silk dyed for the Queen's purple is a strong rich colour, but when it is cut it is dark almost black in the shadows, turning to a glorious and rich purple as the light strikes it.

Amongst the outstanding achievements of Warners during the last quarter of the 19th century was the revival of the Silk Figured velvet weaving in this country.

2. THE PURPLE

The splendid purple dye so prized by the Ancients was derived from certain molluscs or sea snails which are presumably the Buccinum and Purpura described by Pliny and large quantities of the shells have been discovered in heaps close to the Ancient Dye Works at Athens and Pompeii. The molluscs are found throughout the whole of the Mediterranean and indeed in numerous parts of the world varieties exist which may be used for dyeing.

The method employed by the ancients is described by Pliny. The shade of purple varied and two kinds were recognised, TYRIAN and BYZANTIUM PURPLE.

Owing to the vast quantity of shells needed to produce the dye it was of stupendous price and was coveted in the Ancient World and the Middle Ages for its rarity. The conception of the deep red colour was bound up with magic, fertility and power, and purple was held to be the purest incarnation of red. PURPLE as a symbol of power became a ROYAL COLOUR - "Who goes in purple, rules". Purple was so closely linked with the idea of sovereignty that conferring the purple on one of his subjects by a monarch was tantamount to the granting of kingly rank. When Christianity

/Continued.

replaced the old order purple achieved a fresh symbolic significance.

Nowadays the same incomparable colour can be obtained by using synthetic dye-stuffs supplied, in this case, by Imperial Chemical Industries.

3. THE ROYAL PURPLE VELVET FOR H.M. QUEEN ELIZABETH II

The velvet is all silk, 21" wide, and over 20 yards will be required to make the Royal Robe.

The raw silk comes from Zoe Lady Hart Dyke's Silk Farm at LULLINGSTONE in Kent where for some years a serious effort has been made to produce a commercially usable silk. (This silk was used for the Queen's robe in 1937).

From Lullingstone the silk went to Glemsford silk Mills, an old throwing mill in neighbouring Suffolk, where two threads of the raw silk were "thrown" together. From there it came to New Mills to the DYEHOUSE to be DEGUMMED and DYED to the rich purple shade, an expert and ticklish job to match exactly the deep colour in the cut pile of the fabric. From thence to the WINDING on to bobbins, then to the WARPING and TURNING ON by Mr. J. W. Beard who for the fourth time, is contributing his skill to the richness of the Coronation ceremony. He joined the firm in 1896. And so to ENTERING in the loom.

The fabric is being woven by Miss Lily Lee (who wove the Coronation Robe for H.M. Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother) and Mrs. Hilda Calver. Both are highly skilled weavers specialising in the weaving of real silk velvet. The rate of weaving is about half a yard a day.

When woven the velvet will go to the robe makers, Messrs. EDE & RAVENSCROFT of London and from there to the ROYAL SCHOOL OF NEEDLEWORK to be richly embroidered.



THE WEAVING OF FABRICS FOR THE CORONATION OF

QUEEN ELIZABETH II AT NEW MILLS BRAINTREE

1953.

A Note on the Use of the Fabrics

The Abbey

The seating in the Abbey on the ground and in the balconies will rise in tiers, and in front will be FRONTALS of BLUE TISSUE. To the south of the SANCTUARY is the CHAIR OF ESTATE, and behind it the ROYAL BOX, which will have a frontal of GOLD TISSUE, over which will hang COATS OF ARMS embroidered in silk. The same GOLD TISSUE will cover the REGALIA TABLE in the vestibule where the procession into the Abbey is formed. Before the sanctuary and at the crossing of the transepts is the Theatre. Facing the Altar is the CORONATION CHAIR. On the south side are the CHAIRS FOR THE ROYAL DUKES and raised high in the centre is the THRONE.

The Ceremony

THE QUEEN comes in PROCESSION to the Abbey and passes through the Nave and Choir to her CHAIR OF ESTATE for the beginning of the Service wearing her PARLIAMENT ROBE OF CRIMSON. This she discards when she goes to the Coronation Chair where, by the ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, she is Anointed, Invested with the Royal Vestments of Cloth of Gold, including the ARMILL or STOLE, and finally crowned. She ascends the THRONE to receive the homage of her people. Then returning to the altar she kneels at a FALDSTOOL as the Service proceeds. Being ended and Te Deum sung the Queen is disrobed of the vestments of gold and arrayed in her ROBE OF PURPLE VELVET in which wearing her crown and carrying the Orb and Sceptre she leaves the Abbey and goes in the great procession to Buckingham Palace.

The Fabrics

The BLUE SILK WARP TISSUE called the QUEENSWAY is woven for the frontals to the balconies and various curtains in the Abbey. On a blue silk ground the centre of the design appears in gold enriched with a metallic thread. It consists of national emblems (rose, thistle, leek and shamrock) below a Royal Crown composed of ivy leaves, fleur de lys, pinks and other flowers. Between each group which is enclosed by branches of oak leaves are the letters ER in the form of an elaborate scroll. The design was drawn by Professor Robert Goodden, R.D.I., F.S.I.A., and the fabric was produced after many trials and experiments in the sample rooms and studio of Warner & Sons. A GOLD TISSUE in the same design, the QUEENSWAY, is being woven for the frontal of the Royal boxes and for the covering of the Regalia table in the vestibule.

The above fabrics being wanted in considerable quantity are being woven on the power looms at New Mills.

The following especially rich fabrics are being woven on the hand looms.

/Continued

A CREAM SILK LUTE OR LUSTRING (42" wide) - a very rich plain ribbed silk used in the making of banners - is being woven to bear the embroidered Coats of Arms of the Royal persons who will occupy the Royal boxes.

A RICH CRIMSON SATIN (50" wide) will cover the chairs for the Royal Dukes which are on the south side of the Theatre.

A RICH CRIMSON DAMASK (63" wide) in a traditional design carrying 28,800 silk threads in the warp of 63" width will be used for the Throne which stands high in the centre of the Theatre, and also be used for cushions on the Coronation Chair and the Chair of Estate.

A BLUE SILK VELVET (21" wide) for the Caps of the ~~attendants on the Royal Coach. State Trumpeters.~~

A CRIMSON SILK VELVET (21" wide) to carry to Royal Cypher on the Gold Coats of the State Trumpeters.

A CRIMSON VELVET (21" wide) in a strong colour in the finest quality is being woven for the Parliamentary Robe of Crimson which the Queen will wear as she drives to the Abbey and during the first part of the Service.

A RICH SILK TISSUE (50" wide) with a blue ground and gold figure in a design from 15th century Italy, called the "MILAN" is for the Copes worn by the Canons of Westminster.

CLOTH OF GOLD for the Armill. The second of the Royal Vestments with which the Queen is invested before the Crowning is the Armill or Stole. This cloth is woven in silk shot with a flat metal thread of 90% silver and 2½% pure gold. This cloth of shining gold is similar in quality to that used in the other Royal vestments. The *Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths of the City of London* have the privilege of providing the Armil.

A RED SILK DAMASK in a design called the "CANTERBURY ROSE" is for the faldstool at which the Queen will kneel when she leaves the Throne and returns to the Altar.

THE PURPLE VELVET has been woven for the Royal Robe of State which the Queen wears when the Ceremony is complete and she leaves the Abbey in State. Richly embroidered in gold, furred with miniver pure, and powdered with ermine, it will be a magnificent Robe. The velvet is 21" wide and 20 yards are required for the Robe. It is made of English silk from Zoe Lady Hart Dyke's silk farm in Kent. The silk has been thrown at a neighbouring mill in Glemsford, Suffolk, and in New Mills was dyed the splendid deep purple colour which from ancient times has been regarded as a symbol of Kingly rank.



THE WORK OF WARNER & SONS LTD1. HISTORY

SPITALFIELDS, east of the City of London, was the centre of English Silk Weaving in the days of Elizabeth the First and to it came the Huguenot weavers fleeing from France at the end of the XVIII century. A prosperous and pleasant community developed, practising the ancient and skilful craft of silk weaving and producing fine velvet, damasks and brocades so that the monopoly of France in these things was broken.

WARNERS were at work in Spitalfields in the late 17th century when William Warner was a scarlet dyer. His descendant was at work in the early 1800's as a jacquard machinist and card cutter, when the jacquard was a new invention. This Warner's son, Benjamin, founded the present firm in 1870, built the first weaving factory in Spitalfields (weaving had all been in the houses of the weavers) and acquired a great reputation for fine fabrics. The industry had begun to move out to the country in the early 19th century and one firm to do so was Daniel Walters who built a factory in BRAINTREE which also became famous for its weaving. In the middle of the century this factory was much enlarged and called NEW MILLS. The long weatherboarded buildings with continuous windows which we see to-day belong to this period. In 1894 Warners took over this factory and gradually concentrated their production in it. It has been here that they have had the honour of weaving many of the finest of the ROYAL CEREMONIAL CLOTHS. Today the factory includes not only silk handlooms but also a modern dyeing plant and an up-to-date power loom weaving department.

2. PRESENT WORK

The hand loom silk weavers continue to flourish beside the power looms. Their work is for lengths woven in special designs and colour for particular places. An immense number of designs is available and a large number of looms and mountures so that the designs can be woven in a great variety of qualities - damask or brocatelle, brocade or tissue, or any other of the many types of rich silk fabric. The tradition comes from Spitalfields which, in turn, inherited the tradition of the ancient world. The many designs available reflect the history of silk weaving from the 15th century to the present day. Warners regard this work as a CONTINUATION of a GREAT TRADITION rather than the reproduction of the work of past ages.

The weaving includes fabrics for the curtains and coverings in the Royal Palaces, for the British Embassies abroad, for Cathedrals and Churches, for the Halls of City Livery Companies, for public buildings of all kinds, as well as private houses.

Wherever individual pieces are required the hand loom remains a useful and economic method of production. Where greater lengths are required the power loom is used.

The work of the power looms ranges from elaborate tissues and silk damasks to simple and inexpensive fabrics woven in wool, cotton and rayon. These are used in homes throughout the country and like the more elaborate fabrics are exported all over the world. Some are produced in special colours for the furnishing of particular buildings and ships, and others are in standard colours for use in smaller quantities. Designs are continually created in the studio and on the sample looms at New Mills, and in the dyehouse laboratory experiments are made

/Continued

to find the fastest dyes for the fresh colours that are unceasingly required. Where such a great tradition has been inherited the most inexpensive fabrics woven on the power looms must in their way possess the same virtue as the precious fabrics from the hand looms.

3. SOME OF THE FABRICS WOVEN FOR PREVIOUS ROYAL OCCASIONS

Amongst the orders which Warners have had the honour of weaving are:-

The bridal dress for Princess May, later Queen Mary, in an exquisite design of white silk and silver thread.

For the Coronation of King Edward VII. The cloth of Gold for the Pallium worn by the King, the Royal Purple Velvet, satin for the Queen's dress and Crimson Velvet for the Peers. It was the Queen's especial wish that the velvets should be woven in this country and it resulted in a revival of English velvet weaving.

A paragraph from one of the many newspaper accounts of exactly fifty years ago reads:-

"During the few weeks that the Cloth of Gold and the Royal Purple have been in course of manufacture at Braintree many hundreds of visitors from all parts of the country, and not a few of them connoisseurs of high class work, have visited Messrs. Warners factory and admired these valuable fabrics as they have been turned out of the quaint old fashioned hand looms".

For the Coronation of King George V. The Cloth of Gold for the Super Tunica which is worn by the King under the Pallium. A very rich satin for the Queen's dress and purple and crimson velvet. (The Royal Robes were worn again at the Delhi Durbar). Also a figured velvet for the thrones.

For the Coronation of King George VI. The Royal Purple velvet for the robes of the King and Queen and the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret Rose. The Cloth of Gold for the canopy to be held over the King during his Anointing, Silk Satin for the Queen's dress and other fabrics for the Abbey, including 1,200 yards of a brocatelle to cover the frontals of the balconies. (The velvet for the Queen's robe and the satin for her dress were made of English silk from Lullingstone Castle).